

Chapter 1- The Funeral

“Gotta go to the bathroom... gotta go to the bathroom...” Harry Potter repeated over and over in his mind until the words lost all meaning. He and Dudley had just spent the past two hours celebrating their graduation from their fifth years at school by having a soda drinking contest, which Harry won. Sadly, it was a pyrrhic victory. Harry had set a personal record by chugging down fifty-three cans of soda, and now he had to let it out... but where?

The restaurant in which the two of them had held the contest was just a small diner, it had no bathrooms, and it was on a busy street, with very few other businesses. All there was were houses, and Harry had to resist the urge to barge into one and demand to use the bathroom. The closest place they could seek refuge was Dudley’s house, but that was a little more than a mile away... could they make it?

“Why don’t you just use some magic and teleport us back home or something?” asked Dudley, looking extremely red in the face, and almost in pain.

“I can’t... I left my wand at home,” said Harry, wanting to hit himself in the head for doing so. He had been so used to just having his wand with him wherever he went that he forgot that he actually had to bring it with him in order to have it. Back at Hogwarts, it was normal to have his wand with him wherever he went.

Of course, nothing like that would be normal to us, only to Harry and the rest of the wizarding world. You see, despite what you may think from the contest, Harry Potter is not a normal boy. He is a fifteen year old, going on sixteen, wizard student at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry. There, he among many other students learn how to perform fabulous magic, and gain powers that could help them in dangerous situations, everyday life... or situations much like the one Harry was in now.

“Arg, if I had my wand I could just summon us a toilet or something,” groaned Harry and he walked slowly forward, the pain growing with each step.

“Oh, there has to be a place somewhere around here,” said Dudley, gripping his stomach and desperately turning his head in all directions.

Harry couldn’t help but smile. This was his and Dudley’s first time out doing something together, and actually enjoying each other’s company. For the past five years during summer vacations at Hogwarts, and for ten years before then, Dudley’s family, the Dursley’s, watched Harry. His parents were killed by the most terrible and vicious dark wizard in over a century: Voldemort. He attacked their house one night, to try and steal Harry from his parents. Both of his parents died in the attack, but Harry managed to survive due to his mother sacrificing her life for his. When Voldemort performed the killing curse on Harry, like he had done on hundreds of others, it just rebounded off of the invisible shield of love, and gave Harry only a small scar on his forehead.

When the curse rebounded back to Voldemort, it nearly killed him, turning him into a feeble spirit that wandered the world for thirteen years, trying to regain his former power. At the end of Harry’s fourth year at Hogwarts, Voldemort managed to resurrect himself, and rose to become even more horrible than before. Now, instead of trying to kill Harry, he has been trying to recruit him into his army of darkness.

Up until now, Harry hadn’t stopped worrying about Voldemort. But, at this moment, he had more pressing matters at hand; like his exploding bladder.

“Oh man, we’ve got to find a place quick!” yelled Dudley and Harry at the same time, surprising each other. After a quick laugh, they returned to their previous states, and continued looking.

Suddenly, a place appeared before them. It was the most glorious place in the world. It shone its magnificent light, becoming the greatest building of all. It was like a mirage in a desert, it was salvation in a city. It was...

“A funeral home!” exclaimed Harry, pointing it out to Dudley. His face suddenly perked up.

“Oh yeah, they have to have ‘facilities’ in there!” he said, looking happier than Harry had ever seen him. With every ounce of energy in them, the two boys ran toward the building, gritting their teeth, and trying to stop their eyes from watering. Finally, after what felt like hours, they reached the front door and burst inside.

“May I help you... gentlemen?” asked a man at a desk in front of them. At first, he had a pleasant tone, but then once he saw the condition of Harry and Dudley’s clothes (not at all appropriate for the place they were in) he immediately stuck his massive nose high in the air, stood up, and put on a snobbish attitude.

“Yes, do you have a bathroom anywhere?” gasped Harry.

“Well yes, but they are only for people visiting the deceased,” said the man, sticking his nose, if it was possible, higher into the air. “Are you here to pay your respects?”

“Um...” stuttered Harry.

“Yes... yes of course,” interjected Dudley. “We’re here to... um... see grandma! Yeah, right! Grandma!” The man put his nose down slightly.

“Oh really? Well, Mrs. Perenelle is still accepting visitors,” he said, sitting down and pointing his arm in the direction of a long hallway. “You may go see her.”

“Thanks,” groaned Harry and Dudley together quickly, running off as fast as they could.

“What did you think you were doing?” demanded Harry, elbowing Dudley in the side. “What if they didn’t have any dead women? What then? Where would ‘grandma’ be?”

“I dunno,” shrugged Dudley. “We’d just run away I guess. Sometimes you’ve got to take a chance. I did, and it paid off!”

“We’re lucky it did,” said Harry. “Now where’s the bathroom?” Both of them turned their heads in every direction, scanning the hallway, trying to find the familiar signs of a lavatory. Suddenly, Dudley tapped Harry on the back, gasping that he saw one. They ran over to it, faster than they had ever run in their lives; even faster, for Harry, than when he was trying to get away from Voldemort.

After several minutes, both boys left the bathroom, their tongues hanging out, feeling greatly relieved. Harry put his hand on Dudley’s shoulder.

“Let’s never do that again,” he said.

“Well, just don’t forget your wand next time and we’ll be okay.”

“Hey Dudley, what should we do about... her?” asked Harry, pointing to the room that the woman was in that they were supposed to be seeing as they walked by it.

“What about her?”

“Well, it’s thanks to her that we were able to use the bathroom. The least we could do is thank her.”

“I guess so... let’s just make it quick.”

The two of them quickly popped into the small, slightly decorated room. Harry was surprised, however, at the lack of flowers or pictures. It was as if no one had been there, as if no one cared that she had died.

“Look at this,” said Dudley, reading the guest book. “No one’s been here yet, and according to this, the wake ends in just a few minutes. Where is everyone?”

“Maybe she didn’t have any friends or family,” suggested Harry, walking over to the open coffin. He looked in, and saw an extremely old woman inside. Her hair was pure white, with a small golden crown, and she looked at least one hundred years old, if not more. Her face was just a peach colored prune, and there were so many wavy wrinkles in her arms and hands, it was not hard to imagine someone surfing on them.

“Well... thanks,” whispered Harry to her, backing away slowly. “Heh, you saved our lives.... Ready to go Dudley?”

“Yep,” he said, putting down a pen.

“What were you doing with that?” asked Harry.

“I just put down our names in the guest book,” he responded. “To make our story more believable..”

“Good thinking. Alright, let’s go.”

Both of them walked out of the home, trying to look like they were mourning. The man at the front appeared to have been satisfied with their look, he just nodded and went back to his work as they passed by.

“I hope you found your visit... relieving,” said the man.

“Oh yes, it was very relieving,” said Harry, trying not to burst out laughing as they walked out of the door.

The two of them walked the rest of the way back to Dudley’s house, still laughing and reminiscing about their little adventure. Just when they were reliving the best part, Mrs. Figg, their old neighbor (who happened to be a witch and a teacher at Hogwarts) shouted out to them.

“Hello Harry!” she yelled from her door, walking outside.

“Hello Mrs. Figg,” said Harry, walking over to her.

“Oh... hello there Dudley,” she said. “Not used to seeing you two together.”

“Yeah, me and Harry have kind of...become friends since last summer.”

“Oh, well that’s nice.”

“What did you want to tell me, Mrs. Figg?” asked Harry.

“Oh yes! Well, I wanted to tell you that I will not be teaching this year at Hogwarts.”

“What? Why not?” asked Harry, feeling extremely upset. “You were one of the best Defense Against the Dark Arts teachers I’ve ever had... the entire school has ever had!”

“Well, teaching just isn’t my thing, Harry. I much prefer actually being out there fighting the dark forces than teaching how to do it. I only did it last year because there were no others willing to do it, and I felt as though I owed that school something. But, you don’t have to worry; someone just as good, if not better than me is taking my place.”

“Oh I doubt that,” said Harry. “But who is?”

“Professor Quirrell.”

“What!?” yelled Harry, almost knocking himself and Mrs. Figg over. “But, he died five years ago! He was a servant to Voldemort!”

“Oh no no no no no,” said Mrs. Figg, waving her arms. “That was Larry Quirrell. This is Jerry Quirrell, his twin brother.”

“He had a twin brother?” asked Harry.

“Yes, and you know how they say when twins are born, one is supposedly evil, and the other is good? Well, before I knew the Quirrell children, I never believed that. But, they are a perfect example of that theory. Larry was foul, and Jerry is lovely.”

“Well, I hope so,” said Harry, still not feeling too sure. He personally fought Quirrell at the end of his first year at Hogwarts, and it was not a very pleasant experience, nor was it especially easy. “But why are you telling me now?”

“Harry, unlike students, teachers do not have the summers off. Me, among many others, are still quite busy at work, trying to keep the world we live in a safe one. I will be gone for the rest of summer, and wouldn’t have a chance to tell you. I figured it would be better for you to hear it from me rather than just find out on the first day of school.”

“Oh okay,” said Harry. “But, one more thing. Is Snape going to teach Potions again this year, or is someone else?” Mrs. Figg let out a laugh.

“I’m afraid so, Harry,” she said. “Snape will be back.”

“Too bad,” sighed Harry. “I lose a good teacher and gain a bad one, both in the same year. It’d be nice if Lupin could come back... or Sirius.”

“I don’t think Sirius will be coming back anytime soon,” she groaned. “Ever since last year, with Cornelius Fudge having been revealed for what he was, the Ministry of Magic has been extremely desperate to show that they can do something right. So, they went back to their old attempt at catching Sirius.”

“He’s evaded them before, I’m sure he can do it again.”

“I’m not so certain, Harry,” she admitted. “This time, the Ministry is using very advanced magic to find him; especially one spell, the Possession Position Spell. If they get a hold of something that they know belongs to Sirius, they can immediately find him no matter where he is on Earth. I’ve heard he’s trying to give most of his stuff away to his most trusted friends to try and avoid it.”

“I hope they don’t get him...” said Harry, feeling a little worried.

“Now don’t fret too much,” said Mrs. Figg. “I do not want you to lose sleep over this.”

“Speaking of which...” moaned Harry, trying to indicate that he wanted to leave.

“Ah yes, it is getting late,” said Mrs. Figg, walking back to her door. “I’ll see you boys later!”

“Goodbye Mrs. Figg,” yelled Harry, running up to the door to the Dursley’s house alongside Dudley. “And... good luck!”

“Who’s Snape?” asked Dudley when Harry opened the door, having a very dumbfounded look on his face. Harry merely laughed as they walked in. Dudley was so oblivious to Harry’s world, it was funny.

“Where have you two been!?” scorned Harry’s Aunt Petunia the second they stepped inside, as if she had just been standing there, waiting to pounce.

“Will you shut it mom,” said Dudley, closing the door. “I’ll be sixteen in just a few days, I think I can take care of myself.”

“Well of course you can take care of yourself in a normal situation, Dudley,” she said. “But, whenever... he’s around (she pointed to Harry) the situation can never be normal.” Dudley just sighed at her response. Unlike him, the rest of the Dursleys had not yet come to respect the fact that Harry was a wizard, and nothing was going to change that. Dudley waved his arm, indicating to Harry to come into the living room and partake in their favorite activity (even more than soda chugging): watching Monty Python and the Holy Grail.

“Did I tell you watching this movie saved me during a test last year?” asked Harry.

“Hah! and they said memorizing it would never pay off!”

“Oh yeah, and there’s something else I’ve been meaning to tell you Dudley... oh... what was it...?”

“Well, out with it!” he said, taking the movie out of its cover.

“Oh... it was.... Oh man, it’s on the tip of my tongue!” said Harry, snapping his fingers.
“Come on! Use your magic or something to remember!”
“Oh yeah! That’s it, I remember now!”
“What is it?”
“Dudley... you’re a wizard.”

Chapter 2- Dobby Again

Dudley dropped the video to the floor, and he stayed squatted there, with his mouth opened wide. Harry knew he should have waited for a better time... but this was the best he could think of.

“I’m a... what?” stuttered Dudley.

“You’re a wizard, like me,” said Harry, trying to stay calm.

“But- but... how could I... be a wizard?” Harry tried not to smile. Dudley was reacting to the new the same way he did when he was told that he was one too.

“I can assure you that you are.”

“But... I don’t go to that school of yours, and- and... I’ve never done anything... magical. And how could I be... that way... with parents like mine?”

Harry sighed. Voldemort had told him the answers to all the same questions at the end of last year when he was holding Harry captive, and he didn’t really feel like having to repeat it all over again. But, he had to. He had brought this new burden to Dudley, and he had to try and begin to relieve it.

“Well Dudley, to answer your first question, the reason you don’t attend Hogwarts is because Voldemort somehow changed the attendance sheet for the new first years, when it was your time to come, so that your name was not on it.”

“Why did he do that?”

“I never told you about the Kinsafe Charm put on this house, did I?”

“Um... no?”

“I guess not then,” sighed Harry. “Well, when I was brought here, Dumbledore put the charm on the house so that as long as I was around family, Voldemort could not touch me. Now, if you came to Hogwarts with me, I’d still have that protection at school, which is something Voldemort definitely did not want.”

“Oh, okay. I see,” said Dudley, wide-eyed and not looking like he did ‘see’ at all. “But still, how can I be magical? I’ve never done any magic and my parents certainly aren’t!”

“Well, I’m not sure how to say this, but your mom is a witch, Dudley.”

Dudley didn't say anything, he just merely continued to stare at Harry, with a drop of drool slowly falling down from his mouth. Harry decided to keep on talking.

"You know that your mom and mine are twins, but what you don't know, is that their father is Voldemort." Harry stopped there for a second. The thought just occurred to him: Voldemort was his grandfather. He shuddered at the thought. "It's just by chance that he chose to help my mom out at a young age and give her a magic book to read before she even started school, giving her a huge advantage. When the time came for new students to be chosen, Lily so overshadowed Petunia, that they just forgot about her, and she never came to school. So, just because she never went to Hogwarts doesn't mean she lost her powers."

"But why doesn't she use magic now?" asked Dudley, quietly and slowly.

"After a while, I guess Hogwarts discovered their mistake and they wiped her memory, making her forget she was ever a witch. But, yet again, that didn't take away her powers, and when she gave birth to you, you gained some of them."

"So I'm... a wizard?" gasped Dudley.

"That's what I said."

"Wow," said Dudley, slowly getting up and sitting in a chair. "So... am I going to be coming to Hogwarts then?"

"Err..." stuttered Harry, he hadn't really thought about that. He had been meaning to owl Dumbledore. "I think so."

"Oh man... I don't know what to say," said Dudley, starting to look a little better, and possibly excited. "So, I'll be able to make fire, and summon brooms, and even control the weather?"

"Um... sure," said Harry, not wanting to get Dudley's hopes too high. There was always the chance that he wouldn't be coming. But, it couldn't hurt to get him started a little. "In fact, let's practice some right now!"

"That sounds like a great idea," said Dudley, jumping up from off his chair, and dropping the video on the floor, ready to start exploring his new life.

"That's it! Now you're getting the hang of it!" said Harry to Dudley, after his seventieth attempt at trying to perform a simple Lumos Spell resulted in some light. Even though he was using Harry's wand, and was therefore not as powerful as if he had used one that was his own, Harry hadn't expected it to make that much of a difference.

"Hey! I made some light!" squealed Dudley with excitement.

"Good job," said Harry, giving a small yawn. They had been practicing basic spells all day long inside the living room, and it was now extremely late. "But, I think it's time to call it a night. We'll practice some more tomorrow."

"Alright, Harry," he squeaked, giving him his wand back. Harry felt much stronger and more confident when he had his wand; it felt great to have it back.

"Good night, Harry," yawned Dudley, walking up the stairs to his room.

"See you later," said Harry, for one of the first times in his life, actually looking forward to the rest of his summer vacation.

Each day, for the next several weeks, Harry and Dudley practiced magic. Of course, they only did it while not in the presence of Dudley's parents: Harry's Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon. Hearing them walk through the door, returning from whatever they were doing all day (work or mindless gossiping), was the low of the two boys' day.

Finally, when Dudley was able to perform most spells that an average First Year would be able to do, Harry decided it was time to send Dumbledore a letter, to see if Dudley would be able to come to Hogwarts next year. So, when Uncle Vernon walked through the door and their lesson was over, Harry decided it would be a good time to write it.

“I’ve got some things to do,” said Harry, trying to find an excuse. “I’ll see you later Dudley. Keep working on memorizing those spells names!”

“I will,” he said, engaged in reading one of Harry’s schoolbooks, staying in a position that would allow him to quickly hide it if one of his parents entered the room. Harry scooted up the stairs as fast as he could, and when he arrived in his room, he ripped out a piece of parchment from one of his notebooks on which he would write the letter. After just a few seconds of making a mental outline, he wrote:

Dear Professor Dumbledore,

How are you? I am fine here, living with the Muggles. I must say, it has been one of my better vacations, due to my new friendship with my cousin Dudley. Speaking of which, I’m not sure if I forgot to mention this to you or not, but at the end of last year, Voldemort told me that my Aunt Petunia was a witch, and that Dudley is now a wizard. Hearing this, I am wondering if it is possible for Dudley to begin at Hogwarts, since he has the magical power, all he needs is the proper teaching.

Please reply soon.

Sincerely,
Harry Potter

Harry reread it, to make sure it sounded good, and it sufficed. He folded it up, and walked over to his white owl, Hedwig, who was asleep in her cage. Harry opened the small door to the cage, put his hand on her, and shook the owl gently. Her eyes opened, and she gave a quiet hoot.

“I need you to send this to Dumbledore,” ordered Harry, attaching the letter to her leg. Immediately, Hedwig stood up and ruffled her feathers, trying to look important and superior. Harry gave her a small pat, and she nipped his finger. He stepped back and she flew out of the window.

Harry watched her fly away for a few seconds, until she was out of sight. He crossed his arms, smiled to himself, turned around, and gave a yell.

“AAAHHH!”

“Hello Harry Potter!” squeaked an all too familiar creature.

“Dobby!” gasped Harry loudly, clutching his chest and trying to regain himself. “You-you scared me! Don’t sneak up on people like that.”

“I is very sorry sir,” squeaked Dobby. Harry looked at him, and he looked no different from the last time they met, except for the clothes he was wearing. On his arms, he had on some rubber gloves; yellow on the left, and blue on the right. Over his body, he had extremely loose rainbow suspenders, and over those, on his legs, he had very baggy black pants, something you’d expect a punk kid to wear. Harry knew Dobby liked to flaunt his freedom, but he’d never seen him do it to this extent. “But, I is having to sneaks up on you! I is having to tell you something very important!”

“What is it this time, Dobby?” sighed Harry. Last time they had met like this, in Harry’s bedroom, Dobby had threatened Harry not to return to Hogwarts.

"I is very sorry to say this, sir," he squeaked, "but you cannot returns to Hogwarts this year!" Harry sighed.

"Dobby... we've been through this before."

"No!" yelled Dobby, much more forcefully than Harry had ever heard him speak. "No! This times is completely different! This times, if Harry Potter is returning to Hogwarts, he will certainly die, along with many others!"

"Why, what is it this time?" asked Harry in a bored voice. "Has the Chamber of Secrets been opened again?"

"No no no! I is not able to say!"

"But Dobby, you don't have a master anymore. You are a free elf now. You can say whatever you want, whenever you want."

"Not really, Harry Potter, sir. I is still having masters. But, we does not have time to talk now! We is having to leave... now!"

"I'm not leaving, Dobby," said Harry. "Last time, nothing serious happened to me, and nothing will happen this time either. You can either tell me what the threat is now, or let me find out for myself later. Either way, I'm going back to Hogwarts."

"If you is not coming because you is wanting to, you is coming because I am forcing you to!" said Dobby quite loudly. He suddenly put both if his arms out, one on top of the other, with some space in between. He closed his eyes, and began to shake a little, and a blue orb appeared between his hands. The elf then yelled some sort of incoherent chant, and the orb grew ten times its size and imploded on itself, creating a small black hole that was sucking in everything in the room.

Harry was immediately drawn toward it, but he lashed out for the end post of his bed, and held on, his legs high in the air, being drawn into the hole. His entire room was spinning, and everything was being sucked to the middle. On top of that, there was a deafening windy noise, like a hundred tornadoes.

"Dobby! Stop this!" yelled Harry as loud as he could, still holding on.

"Not unless you is coming with me!" said Dobby, as clear as a bell. He was standing in a corner of the room, unaffected by his own spell.

Harry had to think of something. His bed was beginning to shake too, it was being sucked into the hole along with everything else. He had to get out of the room! Harry desperately looked around for anything that would help him.

Then he saw it: his broomstick! Of course, why hadn't he thought of that before? Harry slowly climbed his way up the bed sheets and towards the broom that was still stationary where it was. Apparently since it was magical, the spell had no effect on it, and since it was a Firebolt, it didn't even phase it. Harry continued climbing along his blankets, and soon reached the broom. Just as the bed was beginning to shake, and getting ready to join the swirling mass, Harry made a daring leap from his where he was to the broom, and grabbed on tight.

"See you later Dobby!" yelled Harry, mounting the Firebolt.

"No! Harry Potter cannot leave!" screamed Dobby as Harry raced out of the window, and into the open air. He took a deep breath, filled his lungs, and then exhaled it all out. Flying was the greatest, and most natural to Harry of everything in the wizarding world. It was the most exhilarating thing in the universe... well, at least the second most. There were only two things in the world that could compare to flying on a broom: flying as a gryffin through the air, and being with Cho Chang, the greatest girl in Hogwarts.

Ever since he first saw her in his second year, Harry had had a crush on Cho. However, he had never really done anything about it until last year, when the two of them went out on their first date, and had silently proclaimed each other boyfriend and girlfriend.

As for flying as a gryffin, during his last year, Harry had become an Animagus, that is, a wizard who can transform into an animal without the use of a wand. Harry's gryffin was a half lion and half bird creature, possessing the greatest attributes of both; it was truly a beast to behold.

Harry suddenly snapped out of his little daydream, and returned to the real world. He found himself flying several hundred feet above the ground, looking down at the tiny buildings, cars, and ant-like people. It suddenly occurred to him that he had no idea where he was going. He certainly had to pick a destination. He couldn't return to the Dursleys, at least for a while. Not until he was sure Dobby wouldn't return... which was never. He couldn't fly all the way to Hogwarts... he didn't even know where it was. The last place left he could go, which in this case was definitely not least, was his best friend Ron Weasley's house. Last year, Harry had found himself in a very similar situation (fleeing from the Dursleys) and went to Ron's place for a while. Why not do the same thing again?

Harry sped off in the direction to the Weasley's house, hoping he was going the right way since he didn't have a map this time.

After a few wrong turns and dead ends, (which was very odd since he was in the air) Harry eventually found his way. Once he was on the right path, it wasn't long before he arrived at Ron's house.

It looked just like Harry remembered it: a house that looked far too tall, and at too much of an angle to one side. If such a thing existed in the Muggle world, it would surely fall over within an instant. But, things such as it were common in the wizarding world in which Harry lived in.

Harry flew down towards the front door, dismounted his broom, and 'rang' the doorbell that made the entire house flash bright for just a second. Harry slung his broom over his shoulder, and wondered who would answer the door.

If there was one thing that set the Weasleys apart from any other wizarding family... it would be two things: the fact that everyone in their house had bright red hair that made it appear as though there was an inferno whenever they had a family picture, and the insane amount of children they had. As far as Harry knew, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley had seven children, six boys and one girl. Five of the six boys, however, had already graduated from Hogwarts, and only Ron and Ginny (the girl) were still in it.

Just then, the door opened, and Mrs. Weasley appeared in the doorway. She was a kind, plump lady who was always ready to welcome anyone and everyone. Her face immediately lit up when she saw Harry standing in front of her.

"Oh hello Harry dear!" she said, standing back and opening the door some more for him to walk through. "Come in, come in! What brings you here?"

"House elf trouble," groaned Harry, walking inside.

"Ooh, if I had a nickel for each time I heard that excuse! I'd have... well, let's see here... three nickels!"

"Um... that's good," said Harry, rolling his eyes slightly. As he did, he got a full view of the main room that was usually crowded with Weasleys during the summer, but for some reason, empty right now. "Where is everyone?"

“Oh,” sighed Mrs. Weasley. “Fred and George have finally officially opened up their business down in Diagon Alley. The two of them and Percy are there now, working.”

“Their store is open?” asked Harry, feeling very excited. For the past two years, Fred and George had been wanting to open up a joke shop, and due to a very generous donation from Harry, Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes became a reality. “I can’t wait to see it!”

“Yes, neither could Ginny. She’s down there now, too.”

“But... why is Percy helping? I thought he was working for the Ministry.”

“Oh, with all that happened to Crouch a while ago, Percy lost all will to continue working in that field. No, he left that some time ago, and has started helping Fred and George with their business.”

“Is Ron here?” asked Harry, sounding hopeful.

“Oh yes, he’s in no rush to see the shop. He’s rather enjoying being away from the chaos of their insane inventions, and I don’t disagree. He’s upstairs in his room by the way, playing with his cards.”

“Oh, the chocolate frog cards?”

“No, these are something different. With these new ones, you actually play games. Ron seems to enjoy it, but I Haven’t really looked into it yet. Why don’t you go on up and see for yourself?”

“I think I will,” said Harry, running up the crooked stairs to Ron’s room. He reached the top rather quickly, and threw open the door, revealing Ron’s extremely orange room, and Ron himself, sitting on his bed with playing cards all around him.

“Hello Ron,” said Harry. Ron immediately looked up and waved to him.

“Hello Harry!” he said. “What are you doing here? Muggle trouble?”

“Nah, Dobby.”

“Hmm, I see,” he said, returning to the cards.

“What’cha got there?”

“Oh, it’s a new card game,” said Ron, looking up slightly. “It’s really fun, and it has all sorts of real people and things in it.”

“Have you got a million Dumbledores again?” asked Harry, sitting down next to him on the bed.

“No, he’s one of the rarest ones,” said Ron, still organizing the cards. Harry picked one up, and read it off.

“Let’s see here: ‘Boggart, power of four’ . Well, there might not be much text, but wow! The artwork looks very nice, and they really are based on real things! Is it a fun game?”

“You bet,” said Ron, grabbing the card out of Harry’s hand and putting it in a pile. “Want to learn how to play?”

“Sure,” said Harry eagerly, eyeing all of the cards hungrily. It was as if they had some sort of drawing power on him, beckoning him to touch them, and mocking him for not doing so.

“Alright, well there’s two types of cards: fighters and effects. The fighters... well, do the fighting, and the effects help you and hurt your opponents. Each turn, you get to use two total actions, made up of playing fighters or using effects, or even drawing additional cards. Then, your fighters attack your opponent’s fighters, and once you have no fighters in play, all the damage comes to you, that is, your deck.”

“Sounds kind of complex,” said Harry, his head beginning to spin.

“Nah, not really. No more than Quidditch anyway. Once you play a game or two, you’ll get the hang of it.”

“Can we play a game?” asked Harry, wanting to try it out.

“No, I don’t have enough cards yet, and you need sixty for each deck.”

“Oh, too bad.”

“But... I think I remember dad once telling me that he had quite a collection.”

“What? You mean, this card game had been around before?”

“Oh yeah. This cards game used to be the most popular one, but then the chocolate frog cards took over for a while. Now though, these ones are back and better than ever!”

“Do you know where he kept them?”

Ron put his hand up and began stroking his chin thoughtfully.

“Well I’m not exactly sure, but I do have an idea! Let’s go downstairs!” Ron jumped up from his bed, causing most of his cards to fall on the floor. He ran over to the door, and shouted down with his friend.

“Alright! I’ll be down in a second! Just let me write a note to Dudley telling him where I am!” Harry scanned Ron’s extremely cluttered desk for a quill and a spare piece of parchment. He found a tattered pigeon feather under a pile of books, and ripped out a sheet of parchment from one of Ron’s old books. He quickly scribbled down a note to Dudley, telling him he had some ‘business’ with Ron, and had to leave abruptly, but he should be back later.

Harry folded the letter up, and walked over to Ron’s tiny owl, Pigwidgeon, who was fluttering about in his small cage, looking extremely excited at the hope of sending a letter.

“I need you to send this to Dudley,” said Harry, opening the door to the cage, and attaching the letter to Pigwidgeon’s small leg. “He’s a Muggle that lives in Surrey. You shouldn’t have too much trouble finding him, just look for the most normal-looking house you can see and that’s it.” Pigwidgeon puffed his feathers out, and gave a funny sort of salute. Harry burst out laughing; he looked like a small and extremely fluffy kid who had his cheeks puffed out. A second later, though, Pigwidgeon was out the window and on his way.

Harry, upon seeing that his letter was okay, began walking downstairs to meet Ron. He ran down, as fast as he could, eager to see what Ron had found. When he got downstairs, Harry saw him sitting in a giant red chair in a corner of the house Harry had never really taken any notice of before. Around the chair were two massive shelves, each filled to the point of overflowing with books, like a mini-library. Ron was engaged in reading a particularly large one at the moment, and was flipping through it very quickly.

“What are you reading?” asked Harry, walking over to the chair.

“Reading? No, I’m looking,” said Ron, keeping his head down. “This is a picture album; this entire library is filled with picture albums.”

“Ohh,” said Harry, eyeing the shelves and wondering how many thousands of pictures there were.

“Here, grab one and look for some cards,” said Ron, blindly taking a book down and throwing it to Harry. “I know they’re in one of these.” Harry walked over and cracked open the book. Revealed inside was a single, full page that was like a miniature television screen. Like most wizard pictures, the people and things inside were moving. This picture showed a scene of a young Ron running around in the yard in his diaper, chasing after Fred and George, squealing the entire time.

“Aw, you were such a cute baby!” said Harry sarcastically. Ron peered over and sighed at the sight himself of the picture.

“Keep looking,” he said sternly, turning the page for Harry and putting his own album away and getting a new one. Harry laughed and looked at the next sheet. This time, instead of there being one giant image taking up the entire page, there were nine smaller pictures, each depicting a different event.

“Wow,” said Harry, gazing at each of the photos. He put his fingers out at the top middle one, a picture of two small boys, with red hair of course, playing on a swing set. Harry had no idea who they were, it could be any of the six Weasley boys. But, as Harry looked closer, he saw in the bottom right corner of the picture a girl with red hair, and she looked older than the other two in the picture. As Harry looked even closer, he saw that the girl was writing something in the sand... a single word: “Jamie”.

Harry put his hand over the picture, and swung the book over, to try and ask Ron who the boys and the girl were in the picture. But, just as the album was going through the air, the picture that Harry had his hand on fell out.

“Oh Harry!” said Ron, sounding annoyed. “Try not to make any pictures fall out!”

“Sorry,” apologized Harry, bending over to pick them up. “Wait a minute....” Where Harry had thought only one picture had fallen out, there were actually two now. Harry picked them up, and looked at them; one of the images was the one he had looked at before, the picture of the two boys and the girl, but the other one was completely different. It was a photo of a much younger Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Harry guessed at least ten or fifteen years, with a single, small girl in front of both of them. Who was she?

“Hey Ron,” said Harry, still looking at the picture. “Who is this?” Ron looked up from his album, and glanced at the picture.

“Oh that’s... wait a second,” said Ron, looking surprised. He dropped his book, and walked over to Harry, still looking at the picture. He took the image into his hand, and examined it up close. “Hmm, I’ve never seen this picture before.”

“Well, isn’t it just one of Bill or Charlie?” asked Harry. It was hard to tell the gender of a baby at that age, it could have been a boy. But, Ron shook his head, and showed him the picture, pointing to a calendar in the background.

“No. Bill was born in 1975, and Charlie was born in 1977. The calendar in the back here says the year is 1974. Neither of them were alive at that time.”

There was a few seconds of an awkward silence.

“So... who is that girl?” asked Harry. “I mean, she’s definitely a Weasley.”

“Yeah, just look at that hair! But I have no idea who he is.... The only girl in this family is Ginny.”

“Well, why don’t you just ask your mom?”

“Good idea,” said Ron, sounding serious and standing up. The two of them, with Ron carrying the picture, walked over to Mrs. Weasley who was cooking something for dinner.

“What can I help you with boys?” she asked, stirring something in a pot.

“Mom, who is this?” asked Ron, showing her the picture. “That is, the girl in this picture?” Mrs. Weasley lazily looked over, and turned around, with her pot in her hand. But, when her eyes met the photo, she dropped the container, causing whatever was inside to fall to the floor with a gigantic crash. Her eyes grew wide, and she snatched the photo out of Ron’s hand.

“Mom, are you going to do something about the-” Ron was cut off.

“Where did you get this?” she demanded, not looking at all her normally kind self. Her face was all scrunched up and red, and reminded Harry more of an angry rhino than a loving mother.

“It... it was in the photo album....” stuttered Ron.

“I thought I told Arthur to hide this....” fumed Mrs. Weasley quietly to herself.

“Hide... what, mom?” asked Ron.

“Nothing! Nothing at all!” she said, trying to look cheerful again. She tapped the spill on the floor with her wand, and it magically cleaned itself up. She stood back before her stove, and inconspicuously crumpled up the picture in her hand. “Nothing at all dears, now go run along and-”

“No mom,” said Ron, cutting her off. “Who is the girl in that picture?”

“Oh my! Look at the time!” gasped Mrs. Weasley, looking at a non-existent watch on her wrist. “I had better go do... something.” She began shuffling off, but Ron looked as though he was not going to take no for an answer. He reached into his pocket, and took out his wand.

“Locomotor Mortis!” he yelled, pointing his wand at his mother. Immediately, her legs magically fused together, and she stopped dead in her tracks.

“Thank goodness Dumbledore is letting us use magic at home now,” whispered Ron to Harry. Mrs. Weasley, however, was not looking nearly as happy.

“Ronald Weasley!” she yelled, looking furious. “You had better take this spell off of me before I-”

“No! I want you to tell us who this girl is in the picture!” yelled Ron, unfolding the crumpled image, and pointing to the unknown child. “Evidently, it’s someone important, or you would have told us by now!”

“Ron, take this spell off of me and-”

“Don’t make me go and get the Veritaserum,” said Ron, pointing his wand at his mother. Harry didn’t know how to feel, he was trying to keep quiet. It was very exciting and horrible at the same time what was going on. Mrs. Weasley gave a loud sigh.

“I knew someone would find out eventually,” she said quietly.

“Find out? About what?” asked Ron, looking curious.

“Ron,” said Mrs. Weasley slowly, “there’s something I’ve both wanted and not wanted to tell you for the past sixteen years. I’ve wanted to tell the entire family, actually, but I just... couldn’t.”

“Tell me what? What is it?”

“It is the only secret this family has. The only thing that has ever made this family, at one point, feel weak. It is the greatest loss we had ever faced.”

“What is it already? And what does this have to do with the picture?”

“Ron...” said Mrs. Weasley slowly, “you have another sister.”

Ron's mouth practically fell to the floor, along with his wand. Harry as well felt a wave of disbelief and shock come over him. There was another Weasley girl? How could this possibly be?

"But..." stuttered Ron, "I thought there was just me, Bill, Charlie, Percy, Fred, George, and Ginny. Who else is there?"

"First off," said Mrs. Weasley with a great sigh, "will you please take this ridiculous curse off of me?"

"Yeah yeah, sure," said Ron. Wide-eyed, he bent over for his wand, and removed the Leg-Locker curse from his mother. She rubbed her legs and sat down in the red chair by the library.

"So who is my other sister?" asked Ron, walking over to her. Harry followed.

"That," said Mrs. Weasley, "is a long and not very pleasant tale."

"We've got a few months until we have to return to Hogwarts," said Ron, crossing his arms. "I'm sure that will be enough time to tell it."

"Very well," sighed Mrs. Weasley, slapping her legs. She took a deep breath, and began. "Well, I guess it all starts in the year 1970. That was the year your father and I got married, Ron. It was a lovely ceremony, held in the North Pole, something your father wanted to do. For the next two years, we contemplated having children, what with the state that the wizarding world was in at the time, but decided to go for it anyway. So, in 1973, Jamie was born."

"Jamie? Is that my long-lost sister?"

"Yes, Jamie was her name. Now we, that is your father and I, were perfectly happy with only one child. However, the area in which we lived was not very populated, and except for a few teenagers, Jamie was the only kid. We decided the best way for her to have a playmate was to have another child. So, in 1975, Bill was born, and the two of them were as happy as could be."

"Now, around this time, dark activity was slowing down, and we were actually doing pretty well, financially wise. So, we decided that if we could afford another kid, why not? It would be nice for Jamie and Bill to have another playmate. So, in 1977, Charlie was born, adding to the happiness."

"However, I'm sure as you two know, in a group of three, there is always one that gets left out."

Harry and Ron looked at each other. In their group of three, the two of the and Hermione, it always seemed as though each was getting his or her equal share of attention... right?

"Well, in this case, that was Bill. He was the middle child, and didn't have the glamour of being the oldest, nor the cuteness of the youngest. The only solution we saw for this was to bring yet another child into the world, Percy."

"Now, at this time, Hogwarts was accepting young wizards and witches at the age of ten, if they showed enough talent. Jamie was the most talented witch of her time, and Hogwarts couldn't wait to have her. In 1983, she started at school, and we were left with only three children, and now Percy was the one being left out."

"This is where things all started going wrong... no offense. Arthur and I decided than one more child would be perfect. However, neither of us were prepared for twins. You-Know-Who's rise to power started, and your father had to work extra long hours. It was terrible: Charlie and Bill always asking me for the latest Quidditch supplies, and Percy demanding higher quality books, he could read at that age, all the while, Fred and George were screaming their eyeballs out. I thought nothing else could go wrong... until the day of the fieldtrip."

"Back then, all students at the school could go, not just the upper class wizards and witches. In fact, I think this incident is why they changed that rule."

“Why? What happened? Where did they go?” demanded Ron.

“It was a field trip to the Egyptian pyramids,” continued Mrs. Weasley. “We were so happy that Jamie was going, and we even came to Hogwarts the day she left. And today we are so thankful that we did, that was the last time anyone one of us ever saw her.”

“What happened? Did she die?”

“Perhaps...” trailed Mrs. Weasley. “No one is positive today. All we know for sure is that she was walking along with her group one second, and then suddenly, she was gone.”

“Gone?” gasped Ron.

“Yes. She completely disappeared without a trace. We regret so much only taking that one picture of her, and the other one which had her in the corner. That’s why we have so many pictures of you other kids... in case anything ever happened to one of you.”

There was another very awkward silence.

“So... why haven’t you told any us, mom?” asked Ron slowly and quietly.

“Well, once we found out about Jamie, your father and I were at first heartbroken, and we stayed in that state of complete shock that one can only receive after losing a child for an entire year.

“However, after that yearlong depression, we decided it was time to move on, and the best way to do that, we figured, was to have another daughter. So, two years later, we had another child.”

“Yeah, you had me,” said Ron. “But wait... I’m not a girl!”

Mrs. Weasley gave a small chuckle.

“I know that, Ron, and that’s the reason why we didn’t want to tell you. We didn’t want you to think that you were a failure to us: that you should have been a girl, but you weren’t. Now, since you didn’t know, we decided it would be best if the others didn’t either, so they didn’t go about flaunting their superior knowledge to you. Right now is the first time I have told any one of you kids about Jamie.”

“But what about Bill, Charlie, and Percy,” said Ron, sounding almost a little annoyed. “Shouldn’t they have some memory of Jamie?”

“Oh, they remember her alright,” said Mrs. Weasley, rocking in her chair. “But, they don’t remember her as their sister. After just a few talks, and whenever the question came up, I convinced them that she was simply a childhood friend who moved away while they were little.

“Ah, how I wish I had told you all this before!” she exclaimed once again. “But, I just didn’t want you or even Ginny for that matter to think you were merely replacements, and inferior to the first child.... I’m sorry!”

Ron looked at his mother for a second, she appeared to be ready to burst into tears: both from telling the story, reminding herself of the heartbreak, and for love of her son. Then, Ron just walked up to his mother, and gave her a massive hug, all the way around her.

“It’s okay mom,” he said. “Just... don’t ever do it again!”

“Oh believe me, I won’t,” she said, standing up after their hug was over. “Now, if you’ll please, don’t tell the story to any of your brothers or sisters just yet. I want to be the one to tell them if it ever comes up again, not you.”

“Alright mom,” said Ron, watching her walk back to the kitchen and return to her cooking work.

“Well,” said Harry, breaking his silence, “that was a very dramatic moment.”

“Extremely,” said Ron, returning to the shelves full of albums.

“So... somewhere... out there... you have a sister,” said Harry.

“Eh, I doubt it. I mean, what are the odds that she’s still alive? Slim to none I’d say.”

“Perhaps...” said Harry, reaching up for another book. Then, when he opened this one, hundreds of small cards fell out all over the floor, creating a small, paper pool. “Hey Ron! I think I found your dad’s stash of cards!” Ron looked down at the ever growing pile on the floor and grinned.

“Good job there Harry!” he said, tapping the pile of cards with his wand, and making them all teleport inside a small sac. “Now we can really start to have some fun!”

Harry stayed at the Weasley residence for most of the summer, even celebrated his birthday there. Even though it was just Ron, himself, and Mrs. Weasley there the entire time during the day, all of that changed at night when dinner was ready. All of the Weasleys, except for sometimes Charlie, and occasionally Bill, came home at night to partake in the massive feasts that Mrs. Weasley always had ready. All eight of them, Harry, Ron, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Fred, George, Bill, and Ginny, crowded the table and laughed the entire time, due to Fred and George’s wacky inventions.

It was during those few funny moments that Harry saw Ginny, for the only time during the entire meal, say something (though he wasn’t sure if laughing would be considered talking). She kept to herself most of the time, and Harry wondered if that was because she still had a small crush on him, or if it was because of her new boyfriend: Draco.

Either way, Harry enjoyed spending time there, and his only low point throughout the rest of his summer was when Dumbledore sent him an owl in reply to his letter:

Dear Harry,

I would have to say, I am fine as well. I always love summer, don’t you? Even the worst days are the best... I’m so happy I decided to lengthen it a week.

As for your question, I am sorry to say no. Dudley cannot come to Hogwarts. Despite the fact that he has the talent and the desire, he simply is unable to come. I’m not sure if you have learned about it in school yet, but there is such a thing called ‘magical ripeness’. That is, the longer a wizard or witch waits to perform his or her first actual spell with a wand, and the more powerful the first spell that is used, the greater that wizard or witch will be.

Now, Dudley has never performed any magic with a wand, and he is five years over the usually starting age for school. This means, he will be at least five times as powerful as an average wizard. We cannot take the chance of having this extremely powerful wizard go over to Voldemort’s side. He would be especially easily corrupted and tempted, having had so little experience in the wizarding world.

Once again, I am deeply sorry, but in this day and age, we cannot take the chance.

Sincerely,

Albus Dumbledore
Headmaster

Harry let the letter droop down. So... Dudley wouldn't be coming to Hogwarts with him, Ron and Hermione.... He had been so sure that he would be able to! He shouldn't have gotten his and Dudley's hopes up so high.

"Hey Harry!" called Ron from the other end of the room. "Want to play a game?" He held up two decks of cards and shook them with a smile on his face.

"Sure," said Harry, trying to cheer up. He walked over to Ron, and grabbed one of the decks right out of his hand. "Let's go!"

Harry had gotten extremely good at the card game, which he learned was called Wizard Duel, and had even beaten Ron a few times. Fred, George, Charlie or Bill sometimes even joined in on the fun, creating multiplayer games which were even more exciting than one on one. The only bad part about the game, as Harry was concerned, was that the cards just... stayed cards. If only they could become real....

"Hey you two!" said Fred, during one of those such games. "You still haven't seen the business yet!"

"Yeah, you have to see it," said George, drawing his card.

"What business?" asked Harry, playing a Killing Curse on Bill's dragon.

"Weasley's Wizard Wheezes of course!" said Fred, countering Harry's curse.

"Oh yeah..." groaned Ron, having his elf attacked by the dragon.

"Well, we'll see it when we go to Diagon Alley for supplies for this year," said Harry, using a Pin Spell on Fred's Balloon-Beast.

"Hey! You popped him!" laughed Fred, throwing his beaten card into the air.

Before Harry knew it, his summer was practically over. There was only a week left of school, and Harry was feeling a little guilty for not visiting Dudley again. He had broken the sad news to him that he would not be coming to Hogwarts through a letter, and he had taken it fairly well. Though slightly disappointed, Dudley had not ever really known much about the wizarding world, so he didn't have much to not look forward to.

Even though Dudley didn't, Harry and Ron needed new school supplies, and the only place to go for them was Diagon Alley. Harry especially needed them, seeing as he had left them all at the Dursley's, and did not feel like seeing Dudley right now. So, the day before the beginning of the new year, the two of them headed there with lists in their hands of what they would need.

"Let's see here..." said Ron, taking out his supply list. Harry looked at his.

Sixth-Year Students Will Require:

The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 6
By Miranda Goshawk

Creatures. Creatures! CREATURES!
By Ilike Topet

What Makes Good Wizards Go Bad
By Gulden Armur II

Changing Others: How To Not Jump Back In Surprise
By Shanjez Toncorps

Magical Origins

By Ekstremle Uld

“Hmm, there’s not as many books on this year’s list as there were on last year’s,” observed Harry, eyeing it again. “Looks like I’ll be making up for that by buying a new cauldron, quills, parchment...”

“Yeah, well, this year we mostly use the same ones we used last year,” said Ron, folding up his list and putting it in his pocket. Harry trusted him, he had already had five other brothers go through the system. If anyone knew more about what to expect at Hogwarts, it was Ron.

The two of them purchased their books as fast as they could, wanting to try and get to Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes as soon as possible. Even Ron looked a little excited at the thought of it.

Since the two of them had been to Diagon Alley so many times before, it only took them a few minutes to acquire everything they needed: books, quills, ink, parchment, and some new dress robes, just slightly larger sizes of what they already had. They stuffed all of their purchases into magical bags that stayed their same, small size no matter how much stuff you put inside it, and ran over to Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes.

“Um... Ron...” said Harry. “Where exactly is it?”

“I’m not really sure,” said Ron, looking around. “Fred and George said ‘you couldn’t miss it’, so it has to be around here somewhere.” The two of them, hands over their eyes, scanned the area, looking for any sign of the place. All Harry could see, though, were several small shops, and one rather distinct yellow building....

“Hey Ron!” yelled Harry, pointing at the very tall yellow building. “Is that it?” “Let’s go see,” he said. The two of them ran over to the building, and looked up at it in awe. It was the tallest structure Harry had ever seen, and it was entirely yellow. It looked so fluffy and nice too, it was like a massive marshmallow. And, right above the giant glass door at the bottom of the cylindrical building, there were the words: “Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes, Inc.” in bright, multicolored letters. Through the windows that were all around the building, Harry saw many people inside, purchasing and trying out the items. It looked extremely busy.

Harry and Ron walked up to the front door, and it opened for them, just like a Muggle store’s would. But, after that, something happened that definitely did not occur at Muggle shops. Below Harry and Ron’s feet, there was a sudden burst of air that shot them right up to the ceiling.

“AAAHHH!” both of them yelled. They were now hovering with their heads touching the ceiling. Then, by some invisible force, the two of them were turned one hundred and eighty degrees so that their feet were on the ceiling now, or what was previously the ceiling anyway. Harry expected to feel all the blood rushing to his head, but he felt perfectly fine, as if he was standing right-side up.

“Whoa, what’s going on?” asked Ron, rubbing his head.

“I think that... this room is upside down,” said Harry, looking around. However, the room looked perfectly normal. In fact, there were others in the room in the same position that Harry and Ron were, buying or testing products, and acting as if it was perfectly normal to be upside down.

“This must be just another one of Fred and George’s little tricks, to try and enhance their customer’s experience at their shop,” said Ron, looking around. “Man, look at all this stuff!”

Now that Harry had gotten over the initial shock of being flipped, he took a look at all the items available. The walls were covered in hundreds of colored boxes, ranging from the size of a

small nut to the size of cars! Scattered among those boxes were also tricks and toys that were not packages, just out for people to sample, and many were doing just that. Among them, Harry saw a red-haired young man with a clipboard, checking off and writing many things. Harry immediately recognized him as Percy.

“Hello there Percy!” yelled Harry, waving his hand. Percy looked up from his work, and waved to the two of them.

“Hey there Harry! Ron, you’ve finally come to see it! Isn’t this place great? Though I don’t quite agree with some of Fred and George’s little ideas, like flipping the customers upside down when they enter, a few compromises makes everything worth it.”

“Makes it all worth what?” asked Harry.

“Makes it all worth having the biggest business in all of Diagon Alley!” exclaimed Percy, throwing his arms into the air, and giving a giant grin. “Just this past week, we’ve quadrupled our sales, and in the past month, we’ve made more money than the rest of Diagon Alley put together!” He had a superior-looking expression on his face, and was breathing a little hard too.

“Um... that’s great Percy...” said Harry. “But... where are Fred and George?”

“Oh, they’re working the cash register,” said Percy, returning to his work. Harry and Ron slowly backed away from Percy, and bumped right into the check-out desk. The two of them turned around, and saw Fred and George, working tirelessly, taking transactions. The line for the check-out was so long it went up to the next floor, and money, receipts, and even a few items were flying everywhere. Fred and George, however, looked happier than Harry had ever seen them.

“Hey there Fred! George!” yelled Harry above the excited talk of all the customers. The twins turned and smiled at Harry for a second, and then immediately went back to their work of checking people out.

“Can’t you two take a break for a second?” asked Ron.

“We are taking a break,” came a voice from behind them. Harry and Ron turned around, and saw the two of them standing right there, drinking some sort of wizard soda. Harry felt extremely confused.

“But- you were just... the cash register,” he mumbled out, pointing in random directions. Fred and George looked at him for a second, then suddenly appeared as though they understood what he was trying to say.

“Oh them?” asked George, pointing to the people that looked exactly like themselves behind the desk. “Yeah, they’re our clones. We alternate shifts... it works out well.”

“Clones?” asked Harry, sounding very surprised. Last year, he, Ron, and Hermione had had some very nasty incidents with clones. “Isn’t that a little... bad?”

Fred shook his head.

“Nah, not really. They’re just like regular workers, only they look like us. We pay them, give them a place to live... it works out well.”

“Heh, you’re lucky that it worked out good for you because when me and Harry here tried to clone-” said Ron, before Harry jabbed him in the side with his elbow, signaling to him to stop.

“That’s quite enough, Ron,” he said through gritted teeth.

“Hey, how would you like to have the grand tour of this place?” asked George. “It’s really all quite amazing!”

“Sure!” said Harry and Ron together, eager to see what inventions the two of them had cooked up.

Fred and George showed them the entire store, and it was even more amazing than Harry had imagined it would be. Each room, like the upside-down entrance, had some sort of special feature. Once of them had a floor mad out of a bouncy, jell-o like substance; another one's ground was like that of a game board, and you could only move certain spaces depending on the roll of a dice, and occasionally even had to go backwards due to landing on certain areas; another room had fluffy balls shoot out in every conceivable direction every few seconds, and yet another was a zero-gravity room, one that people floated around in. The last room on the agenda was the dormitory. Inside it, there were six beds (one for Fred and George, their clones, Ginny, and Percy). However, the beds liked to changed places, colors, and stuffings every day, so you never slept in the same one twice.

And, of course, each room was packed with goodies. There were some of the things that Harry had seen Fred and George use last year, but there were also an almost uncountable number of new inventions. There was Giant Gum, a candy that made you grow as high as the ceiling of a room, and the opposite, Shrink Sugar, that made you become the size of an ant. There were Ants-In-Your-Pants-Plants, vegetables that when eaten gave that very unpleasant sensation to the consumer. There was some Gassy Guzzler, a soda that made you float about for several minutes, and Harry's favorite, Itchy Exploders: little bombs that created a gas when set off that made everyone who breathed it in feel itchy all over, and make them scratch for up to ten hours. There were hundreds of other items to see, but Fred and George didn't have time to show everything.

"Yeah, we've got a pretty good system going on here," said Fred, returning to the first floor. "Me and George run the register and come up with ideas for new stuff when it's not our shift, and Percy finds ways to market the new inventions and keeps inventory. He also takes polls to see what items are popular and which aren't."

"Sounds like you guys have it pretty easy," said Ron. "Run the register for a few hours, then come up with jokes for the rest of the day."

"It's actually a little harder than that," said George. "We have to constantly be coming up with new ideas, people can't be playing the same jokes on each other forever, and we can't simply improve on old ideas anymore, we need completely new inventions. It's very difficult."

"Yeah, I'm sure..." said Ron sarcastically, rolling his eyes. Just then, Fred and George's exhausted clones came up to them and told them it was time for their shift.

"Alright, we'll see you later you two," said Fred, heading to the register.

"Yeah," said George, "but remember Harry! All of this... none of it would be here if it wasn't for you!"

"Well... I'm happy to see you have put the money to good use... very good use," said Harry, taking another look at the place. "It's doing much more here than it would have ever done sitting in my account."

"Thanks again Harry!" the two of them yelled, returning to their work. Harry suddenly felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around, and saw Ron behind him, eyes-wide, and mouth open.

"What is it?" asked Harry. Ron didn't say anything, just merely pointed to the wall right in front of them. Harry looked at it and fell into just as much shock as Ron did. Before them, there was an entire wall... full of packs of Wizard Duel cards. Literally, the entire wall was filled with small packs of cards that glittered in the sunlight as if they were gold. Each wrapper had a different image on it, depicting one of the millions of cards. It was truly a sight to behold.

Harry and Ron flew over to that almost-sacred wall, and immediately grabbed several packs off of it as if they were treasure. On the cover of each pack, it said that there were sixteen additional cards: one rare, five uncommons, and ten commons. After taking about ten packs (he

would have bought more, but they were seven sickles each, and Harry didn't have too much money with him) Harry quickly ran up to the above floor and bought a few Itchy Exploders... he just couldn't resist the thought of using one on Malfoy.

The two of them, hands bulging with goods, got in the quickly-moving line, and it was soon their turn.

"Hey! Didn't expect to see you this soon!" said Fred, grabbing their packs.

"I didn't know you guys sold cards here!" exclaimed Ron.

"Oh yeah, they're our best selling items," said George, adding up their total. "We have to get new shipments every night... they go like crazy!"

"Well, I'm proud to say that we're part of those crazy people," smiled Ron, handing Fred exact change for his cards. Harry did the same. The both of them grabbed their stuff, and headed to the exit door.

"Hey!" yelled George. "You two can just use Floo Powder to get out of here! The fireplace is right to your left!"

"Yeah, that'd be a good idea," said Ron, stuffing his packs into his Never-Growing Bag. "Even those bags don't get bigger, they certainly get heavier, and I don't want to have to carry them all the way back home." Harry agreed, and put the packs into his bag and the Itchy Exploders into his pocket.

The two of them walked over to the fireplace, Ron reached into his pocket, took out some Floo Powder, and threw it in, causing the flames to turn from a dark red to a bright green. He stepped right up to the fire.

"The Burrow!" he yelled, right before disappearing into the flames. Now it was Harry's turn. He stepped up, and reached into his pocket for some powder. But, just as he reached in, he accidentally took out one of the Itchy Exploders, and it fell to the floor, causing a large, green cloud of pure itchiness to appear. The effect was instant, and Harry felt as though mosquitoes were biting him all over... he couldn't stop scratching!

But, he had to concentrate on getting the Floo Powder. While he scratched himself with one arm, he reached into his pocket with the other, and grabbed out some powder. He quickly threw it into the flames.

"Th- the bur... ack! It itches! Oh man... the b- Burrow!" gasped Harry, jumping right into the fire. The entire world around Harry turned black, and began spinning rapidly. Faster and faster... until Harry shot right out of the remote fireplace.

"Ron!" groaned Harry, still itching all over. "Where are you?" Harry took a closer look around, and saw that he was definitely not in the Burrow. Everywhere surrounding him, there were dark and decrepit shelves, contained some of the most horrific items that Harry had ever seen: skulls with the eyes still in them, hands that had hands, and many assorted items in jars of water... or at least what Harry thought was water. Harry assumed he must have accidentally arrived at some sort of store, but it looked much more like a tomb.

Suddenly, Harry heard a脚步声 and a loud creak in the floor. He immediately tried to forget about his itchiness and took out his wand. Who else could be here? Could this be a trap? Another creak in the floor echoed throughout the room.

"Who's there?" asked Harry, walking around one of the dusty shelves. A few feet in front of him, there were a figure, hidden in the dark shadows of the store.

"Who are you?" demanded Harry.

"Finally..." hissed the figure. His voice was deep and dark, just like the store.

"Finally? Finally what?" asked Harry. This had to be one of Voldemort's traps! How could he have been so stupid as to let an Itchy Exploder fall on the floor?

“FINALLY!” yelled the figure. Harry had no time to react, the figure just jumped right at him, and pinned him to the floor.

Chapter 4- The Ring

“Ow! Get off me!” yelled Harry at whatever had jumped on him. Drool was coming down from his attacker’s mouth and splashing all over Harry. He was acting like a dog that hadn’t seen his owner in decades. It finally dawned on Harry that this was not one of Voldemort’s minions. A Death Eater would not pounce on his target, but use some sort of spell. This was just a crazy old man.

“Finally,” he yelled again. This time, Harry got a good look at him, and there was only one word to describe him: hideous (hih-day-us). He only had one eye, and it was three times the normal size, with veins popping out all over it. His face was just a sea of wrinkles, and it looked like his nose and mouth were upside down. “Finally!”

“Finally? Finally what?” asked Harry, trying to push the guy off of him.

“Finally!” he thundered, jumping off of Harry and throwing his hands into the air. “A customer!” He brought his arms down, and began tapping his fingers together with a menacing look.

“Um… yeah,” said Harry, just relieved to not have to deal with a Death Eater. “Where am I anyway?”

“You are in The Itchy Man’s Burrow, the greatest shop in all of Knockturn Alley!” the old man exclaimed. He suddenly spun around, giggled quietly, and walked behind an ancient cash register. He put his elbows down on the counter, and rested his head on top of his bandaged and mangled hands. “Now… what can I interest you in?”

Harry sighed; he didn’t want to make the man feel bad, but there was nothing in the shop that Harry was even slightly interested in. In fact, most of the items made Harry feel as though he was going to throw up.

“Um… I’m sorry, but there’s really nothing-” said Harry slowly before the man interrupted him. He glared at him with his one massive eye that had a distinct twinkle to it, and suddenly pointed to a small and cobweb-covered sign above him. Written in dark red ink, that Harry thought could have been blood, were the words: “You enter, you buy something, lest you die.” Harry swallowed hard. Even though the man looked old and weak, he probably knew a few magical tricks.

“Yes, you see,” hissed the man, “if you leave without something from my store in your hands, you will explode. I’ve enchanted all of the exits, so don’t even try.”

“Well, I can see why this place is so popular,” said Harry to himself, looking around for a cheap and non-disgusting item that he could quickly buy. Harry looked behind the register, and saw an assortment of different jewelry. Maybe he could buy something for Cho. Quickly looking at the selection of different earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and… rings. Those seemed to be the greatest of all the jewelry available, and Harry took a closer look at them.

There were at least a hundred rings pinned to the wall, each with its own unique Stone and symbol, though they were all almost exactly the same size and shape. There were gold rings with ruby phoenixes, there were jade rings with crystal stars. All of them looked incredibly

expensive, and Harry only had a galleon and a few sickles left after his spree at Fred and George's store.

Just then, Harry's attention turned to a single ring. It was in the very bottom, right hand corner, and it had a single cobweb over it, as if the spider were trying to hide it from view more than it was already. From the looks of it, this one didn't appear too expensive, with its rather dull ring and not very shiny Stone.

"How much for that one?" asked Harry, pointing to the ring and trying to sound casual. The tattered man looked at where Harry's finger was indicating, and reached a bandaged hand over to it. He brushed away the cobweb, and blew the dust off of it as he brought it forth. He stuck out his bottom lip, rocked his head from side to side, trying to get a good estimate.

"How much ya got?" he asked. Harry took out his galleon and three sickles, and the man quickly snatched them away. "Well what do you know? That's exactly how much it costs!" He gave a toothless grin, and popped the ring into Harry's hand.

Then, just as the ring touched Harry's palm, he suddenly felt a power rush through him. He felt a surge of energy and excitement flow through his bloodstream, and all the way up to his brain, electrifying his body all the way. Harry quickly slipped the ring onto his finger. He brushed it off a bit more, and realized that the dull Stone was actually carved into the shape of a skull with one crystal eye and one ruby eye. Now, in fact, the skull was no longer a dull gray, but a brilliant black that shone like the darkest Stone. The powerful feeling that Harry was experiencing only increased while the ring was on his finger.... Maybe he wouldn't give the ring to Cho after all, he smiled to himself.

"Will that be all?" grinned the man.

"Well, seeing as you did take all of my money..." said Harry.

"Ah yes, I forgot about that," he said. "You can leave now... you won't explode."

"Alright," said Harry, walking towards the door. "Oh, and thanks for the ring."

"No problem," coughed the man, heaving something large and disgusting out of his mouth just when Harry opened the door and left the store. When Harry stepped outside of the place, and saw that he was still in one piece, he took a look around. Though he had been to Knockturn Alley before, he had never been in this part of it. None of the other stores in the area looked any better than the one he had just been in; all of them appeared as though just one good wind could make them fall over. Even the sky looked decrepit in this area: it was dark and gray, and the air felt heavier and rusty. It was nothing like Diagon Alley.

Now Harry had to find a way out of this place. He didn't want to go back into The Itchy Man's Burrow, nor did he desire to go into any of the other stores. He had to find a fireplace to Floo from that would allow him to return to the Weasley's. All Harry had to do was turn his head slightly to the side, and his prayers were answered.

It was like a Muggle phone booth, only much larger, and with a fireplace inside; a Floo Station. Harry ran over to it, and entered into it. It felt extremely calm and serene inside, the crackle of the fire and the silence from the horrible outside made for a very nice environment. There was even, attached to the side of one of the walls, a Floo Powder dispenser.

"I guess a lot of people must accidentally come here," said Harry to himself, wondering why there would be a Floo station in the middle of Knockturn Alley.

"Maybe the store owners purposely name their business closely to other popular landmarks," shrugged Harry, throwing some powder into the flames. "The Burrow!" Harry jumped into the flames and once again the world turned black and spun around quickly. A second later, Harry appeared right in the Weasley's house, before a distressed looking Mrs. Weasley, and a worried Ron.

“Where have you been?” demanded Mrs. Weasley, jumping at Harry, and putting her hands on his shoulders.

“Yeah, I was beginning to think you were another one of my missing sisters or something,” grinned Ron. Mrs. Weasley, not turning away from Harry, whacked Ron on the head.

“Where have you been?” she asked again.

“I accidentally Flooed to Knockturn Alley,” groaned Harry.

“Again?” said Mrs. Weasley and Ron together

“Yeah,” grimaced Harry... he really had to stop doing that. It was the second time in... well, four years. His track record wasn't that bad.

“Are you alright, Harry?” asked Mrs. Weasley, trying to sound comforting, but not overly caring. She didn't want Harry to think as though she were treating him like a baby.

“Yeah, I'm fine,” he smiled, then, rubbing his ring, “Yeah, I feel better than ever in fact.”

“Well good,” said Ron. “I guess you didn't have to go in the really bad stores.”

“It appears as though you haven't been traumatized too badly,” said Mrs. Weasley, eyeing Harry, just to be sure. “So, I don't think you'll object to me telling you that you will still have to go to school tomorrow. With that in mind, I think you two should think about heading to bed. It is almost midnight anyway!”

“Yeah, I suppose you're right mom,” yawned Ron. He and Harry walked over to the stairs that were more tiring to climb than an entire mountain. Harry had not realized how exhausted he actually was. He and Ron quickly changed into their night clothes while Harry told Ron of his interesting time at Knockturn Alley.

“He really wouldn't let you leave until you bought something?” asked Ron in surprise, just before he climbed into his bed.

“Yeah, so I finally decided on this ring,” said Harry, showing it to Ron.

“Nice,” said Ron, nodding his head. “But, aren't you going to take it off before you go to bed?”

Harry looked at his ring... it was so beautiful.... He rubbed it with the tip of his finger, and watched the skull and diamonds shine. A small surge of excitement and energy flowed through him. Harry took a deep breath, feeling full of life.

“No,” he said finally, climbing under the covers. “No, I don't think I'll take it off.”

“Get up you two! Get up!” came the voice of Mrs. Weasley what felt like only a few seconds after Harry had placed his head down on the pillow. “Come on! The train is leaving in an hour, and you want to have time to get ready! Oh, and Harry, a letter came for you.”

This comment made Harry jump out of bed and immediately get dressed. He ran downstairs, and asked Mrs. Weasley where his letter was. She gave it to him, and Harry was surprised that it had a Hogwarts seal on it. What was the school doing sending him letters an hour before the new year started? Harry ripped it open, and read:

Dear Harry,

After the Sorting Ceremony, I need you to come up to my office. I have something for you. The password is ‘monkey cakes’.

Sincerely,

Albus Dumbledore
Headmaster

“What could it be?” wondered Harry, biting on a piece of toast that Mrs. Weasley had prepared for the two of them... but wait!

“Mrs. Weasley,” asked Harry, suddenly realizing something, “how is Ginny coming to Hogwarts? I mean, she’s spent most of the summer at Fred and George’s shop.”

“And they’re bringing her to the Platform,” responded Mrs. Weasley. “Both of them have very nice brooms to fly over with. I guess they’ll be coming over about the same time we are. Which, by the way, would be much improved if you (she pointed to Ron who had just come down the stairs) hurried up in waking.”

“Yeah, yeah...” yawned Ron, grabbing some breakfast and quickly eating it. “Let’s just get this year started already. Are we leaving soon?”

“Just as soon as his majesty is done with his breakfast,” said Mrs. Weasley sarcastically, bowing to Ron. He just rolled his eyes and continued eating. It wasn’t long, though, before they were out the door and at Platform 9 3/4.

“Hey there Harry!” came a voice from not to far away. Harry looked over and saw Fred and George waving to him. He and Ron ran over to them.

“Hey there!” yelled Ron. “Did you bring Ginny?”

“Yup, she’s already gone through,” said George. Fred sighed.

“Kind of sad... this is the first year we haven’t gone through this barrier,” he said. “I almost wish I was going back...” He put a smile on. “Almost....”

“Yeah, whatever,” said Ron, running through the supposedly solid brick wall that led to the train.

“See you Fred! George!” yelled Harry, running after Ron head first into the not very brick wall. Just like traveling with Floo Powder, the entire world turned black, but only for a second, and the next thing Harry knew, he was standing amidst hundreds of other students, anxious to get on the train. He quickly found Ron among them and they walked on board together, into their usual compartment. It was very nice and relaxing... this was one of the first times they weren’t late or rushing to get on the train.

A few minutes later, after sitting there and chatting for a while, Harry felt his ring get a little warm, as if he were holding it close to a fire. Harry looked over at it, and saw that it was glowing a little yellow too....

Suddenly, Harry’s thinking was broken by the compartment door opening, and his other best friend, Hermione Granger, stepping in. She walked right on in and sat down next to Ron.

“Why hello, Ron,” she smiled, giving him a small kiss. “It’s been nice talking to you.” Harry raised an eyebrow.

“We’ve been talking through letters all summer,” explained Ron, blushing a little.

“Oh really?” asked Harry, crossing his arms. “I don’t remember seeing you write.”

“Well, I mostly did it at night...”

“Even then I didn’t-”

“After I saw you had gone to sleep.”

“Ah ha,” said Harry. “I see.”

“And it wasn’t only letters he sent to me during the summer,” smiled Hermione. “Ron also sent me this.” She pushed out her arm, and lifted up her sleeve. Revealed underneath was the most beautiful bracelet Harry had ever seen in his entire life. Even from just the little light

coming in from the window in the side of the compartment, the bracelet shone bright like the sun... brighter even.

"Wow, where did you ever get that Ron?" asked Harry, in awe.

"On our vacation in Egypt," said Ron. "I actually found it in one of the pyramids we went to. I've just been saving it in my desk for the right occasion... or person."

"You didn't steal it? Did you?" asked Harry as the train started moving.

"Well, not really," said Ron. "It's kind of funny actually, the bracelet was just lying there in the middle of the room, as if asking to be picked up."

"It was just... lying there?" asked Harry.

"Yep, and I just happened to be the first person to see it. I hid it from the rest of my family, who'd either want me to return it or cash it in to save for later or invest in their business."

"Speaking of business," interjected Hermione, "I heard Weasley's Wizard Wheezes is doing quite well."

"Yeah, but me and Harry know the real secret to their success," said Ron.

"We do?" asked Harry.

"You do?" asked Hermione.

"Yep," said Ron, putting his hands behind his head and leaning back. "They sell Wizard Duel cards... that's where most of their money comes from." At this remark, Hermione rolled her eyes.

"Oh no, not that card game," she said.

"Hey, what's wrong with it?" asked Ron, sounding hurt. "It's a fun game!"

"Well, I like the fact that it teaches people about that many different wizards and items that have historical value, but it's just a silly game. I don't know why some get so obsessed with it."

"Hey!" said Harry. "That reminds me! I still haven't opened my packs of cards!"

"Oh don't tell me you're into that game too?" said Hermione. Ron ignored her comment.

"Really? You didn't? I opened mine as soon as I got home, before I realized that you weren't there."

"Did you get anything good?" asked Harry, looking through his bags for where he put the packs.

"Nah, not really," said Ron. "Just a few copies of what I already have mostly."

"Ah ha, here they are!" exclaimed Harry, bursting from his bag with the packs of cards that he bought. He threw them onto the seat next to him, and immediately grabbed the first one. On the front, there was a picture of a house elf.

"A house elf? Hah, don't expect anything good in that one," said Ron, peering over to see what Harry would get.

"Don't judge a book by its cover," said Hermione, looking over at Harry's card pack even though she said that she detested the game.

Harry quickly tore open the pack, watched the wrapper fall to the floor, and then magically disappear.

"Ahh, an Anti-pollution Charm, very nice," commented Hermione.

Harry looked through the cards, flipping through them as fast as he could, trying to find the rare one in the pack.

"Yeah, Grindylow, another Boggart," said Harry, naming the cards as he passed by them. "Hey a Kneazle! Speaking of which, where's Crookshanks, Hermione? I haven't seen her yet this year, and now that I think of it, I didn't see her much at all last year either."

“Oh, I put him in the storage compartment in the back,” said Hermione. “Yeah, last year, Crookshanks was gone for most of the day, out catching food I suppose. Only really saw him during the late afternoon and evening. But, don’t worry, I’ve only lost Crookshanks once at the beginning of the summer, I’m getting better at controlling him. Oh yeah, and-”

“Oh... my... god...” said Harry interrupting her, his eyes were wide, and he was staring at a single card in his hand, evidently the rare one.

“What is it Harry?” asked Ron and Hermione.

“Did you get a really rare one?” asked Ron.

“I got,” said Harry, turning the card around, and showing it to them, “Voldemort.”

Chapter 5- The Field Trip

The picture on the card was different than any other Harry had ever seen. Instead of just being a flat moving image, this one appeared almost three dimensional. Behind the horrible, cloaked figure, there was a sparkling black background that just added to the mysticness and amazement of the card.

“How could they even think of putting HIM in the game?” asked Harry, shocked.

“Well, he is a very important historical figure...” said Hermione.

“Yeah, and he’s really rare too!” drooled Ron. “Look at that! A four-star rarity! I only thought it went up to three!”

“It doesn’t matter,” said Harry, turning the card around and glaring at the horrific image of Voldemort, stroking his chin, and giving an occasional laugh. “They still shouldn’t put him in the game.”

“Oh come on Harry,” laughed Ron. “Look at his power! It’s through the roof! You could probably win most games with just that one card!”

“I suppose so,” said Harry, tucking the Voldemort card away along with the rest of his small collection. He also put his unopened card packs in his bag too, he didn’t really feel like opening any more today.

“Well, if you don’t want him, I’ll gladly take him!” offered Ron.

“No way,” laughed Harry, feeling better.

The rest of the rather short trip was pleasant, talking about their summer vacations, and of course, making comments on Hermione’s bracelet. It was like nothing Harry had ever seen before.

Before long, however, the train ride came to an end and the three of them got off just in time to see their teacher and friend, Hagrid. He was at least twice as tall as any man, and five times as wide... he almost took up as much space as all of the new first year students he was leading up to the castle.

“Hullo!” he called to Harry, Ron, and Hermione. “Good ter see ya, but I can’t talk now. Gotta lead these newbies up to th’ castle. I’ll see ya later!” He, along with a few new first years, and five other students that did not look anything like first years, but rather sixth or seventh years, made their way to the boats they would take to cross the lake and to the massive citadel.

“See you later Hagrid!” yelled the three of them, making their way to the much more luxurious carriages that quickly took them to the front gate of Hogwarts which they quickly burst through, eager to start the new year... and to eat at the start of school feast!

Harry, Ron, and Hermione speedily found some seats at the Gryffindor table and waited anxiously as the rest of the Gryffindors filed in. The table looked especially empty, now that all the seventh years from last year were gone... then a thought suddenly came to Harry. He nudged Ron in the side.

“Hey Ron!” he whispered loudly. “We’re going to have to hold tryouts again! We need five new people for the Gryffindor Quidditch team! Fred, George, Alicia, Angelina, and Katie all graduated last year.” Ron’s eyes widened.

“Oh man,” he gasped. “I totally forgot about that.”

“Oh well, it shouldn’t be that difficult,” said Harry. Then, remembering that at the end of last year, a group of last years’ new Gryffindors promised that they would make the team, Harry began to think that maybe it wouldn’t be as easy as he initially speculated.

“Come on Harry,” interjected Hermione, “put on your Prefect Badge! You need to show all of the new first years where they can go if they’re lost or having trouble.” She quickly reached into her pocket, and pinned on her shiny badge, wearing it proudly.

“Ugh... the last thing I want is for more first years to be crawling all over me,” groaned Harry, taking out his grimy badge and trying to clean it up a bit.

“You should really take your Prefect responsibilities more seriously,” said Hermione severely. “I noticed that last year you never took any house points away from anyone, nor did you ever read the Prefect Guidebook, which I’m sure you must have lost by now or something.”

“Fine fine fine,” said Harry, pinning his slightly cleaner badge on, “I’ll try to do a better job this year Miss. Hermione.” Harry tried to look as cute as he could, pretending to be a little preschooler. Ron laughed, but Hermione merely turned away.

“Shh!” she said. “The Sorting is starting!”

And so it was. The doors to the Great Hall burst open and the first years who had crossed the lake with Hagrid now walked up to the front of the room in a single straight line, led by Professor McGonagall. Once again, Harry saw that five of the new students did not look like first years at all, they looked more along the lines of Harry’s age.

“What’s up with them?” asked Ron.

“Maybe they’re more exchange students from other schools, like Tci was last year,” suggested Hermione. Harry hadn’t thought of that, and she was probably right; they were just new students from Durmstrang.

“Well, whoever they are, they are definitely cool,” said Ron, eyeing them and smiling.

“What makes you say that?” asked Harry.

“Just look at their pockets!” pointed Ron. Harry looked over, and almost laughed at the sight. The pockets of the five new students were literally overflowing with Wizard Duel cards. Every now and then, one fell on the floor, and the student who dropped it just magically brought it back up, proving that they were definitely not newcomers to the world of magic, they had had some training.

Finally, the line stopped, and professor McGonagall stepped up to the head of the room with a big sheet of parchment that had all the names of the new students on it. She also took the large, black, pointed hat off of her head, and placed it on a stool that was next to her. Harry realized that this was no ordinary hat, that was the Sorting Hat. It suddenly shot up into the air a few feet, a small hole appearing for its mouth, and started singing:

“You should listen to what I have to say,
It’s different every year on this same day.
You see, I am the Sorting Hat;
And I will tell you where you should be at.
If Gryffindor is what I bark out loud,
Then you possess a soul that is brave and proud!
If Ravenclaw is what come out of my mouth,
Then you are the wisest in your house.
If Hufflepuff is what I say,
Then you are loyal, behind your friends is where you stay.
If Slytherin is what I hiss,
Then you are cunning, you know when something is amiss.
But, who cares? Just try me on!
I’ll tell you where you belong....”

Everyone clapped respectfully and the hat fell back down to its seat, with a slightly smug look on its face, or at least Harry thought that’s what its expression was; it’s very hard to tell with hats.

“Trenholm Archibald,” said Professor McGonagall. A quite tall boy walked up to the hat, not looking nervous at all, and threw it right on his head.

“Gryffindor!” yelled the hat, causing the Gryffindor table to clap and cheer as he walked over and sat down. The first sorting was over.

“Ai Gomon!” continued Professor McGonagall, causing one of the bigger new students, his pockets bulging with cards, to walk up to the hat and place it on his head. Almost immediately, the hat yelled out his house name.

“Slytherin!”

The whole of Slytherin table applauded for their bigger new student, and Malfoy and Tci even stood up for him, welcoming him in to their clan. Harry noticed, that for the first time, Malfoy didn’t have his cronies, Crabbe and Goyle, sitting next to him. In fact, they were all the way down at the other end of the table, looking hopelessly lost.

“Oh well, I guess Malfoy has gotten better friends now,” thought Harry to himself, returning his attention to the Sorting.

Ten minutes later, Brad Cooper, Susej Tsirch, Stephen Early, and Kevin Williams were the latest Ravenclaws, Megan, Kyle, and Lydia Yasigian were the newest Hufflepuffs, and three more of the older new students (Faire Morter, Avait Malmin, and Fonce Kuroi) went to Slytherin in addition to Rusty Johnson. Gryffindor had only gotten one other besides Trenholm so far: Chad Horahoe.

“Aku Tenshi!” yelled Professor McGonagall, looking rather happy that he was the last person on the list. He was a very tall and skinny boy, with a rather pale appearance. In fact, he reminded Harry of himself a little.

Aku walked up to the Sorting Hat with a grin on his face. He slowly sat down, causing his cape to go up in the air for a second, then come back down like a bat flapping its wings. He placed the hat upon his head, and after a few seconds....

“Gryffindor!” it yelled out.

The Gryffindor table erupted into applause. They had gotten one of the older new students! Aku walked over to their table, and chose a seat right next to Harry.

“Hey there, Aku!” said Harry, trying to be friendly.

“Please, call me Ak,” he said with a wave of his hand, and a grin of his perfect and shining teeth. There was something warm and inviting about him that Harry really liked.

“Alright then... Ak,” said Harry, “I see you like the Wizard Duel card game.”

“Oh yes,” beamed Ak. “In fact, at Durmstrang, we, that is Faire, Avait, Fonce, Ai and me, started a Wizard Duel Club. We’re thinking of starting one here too!”

“Whoa! That’d be awesome!” said Ron excitedly.

“Oh, Ak, this is Ron, my friend,” introduced Harry.

“Nice to meet you,” said Ak.

“Likewise,” said Ron, looking more at Ak’s cards than his face.

Suddenly, their conversation was cut off by Dumbledore standing up to make the usual annual announcements, like he did every year at this time. He took a last swig of his drink, brushed off his beard, and began speaking.

“Hello students!” he boomed, his voice magically magnified. “I am happy to announce, thought I am sure may of you are not, that we are starting a new term here at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, under me, Minister Dumbledore.”

There was a bit of polite applause. Harry remembered that last year, the previous Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, stepped down for covering up Voldemort’s attacks due to being blackmailed. Dumbledore had been elected in his place.

“Now, for announcements,” he continued. “First and foremost, to all you new students, the Forbidden Forest is. That is, it is forbidden to go in, no matter what, under every and all circumstances. Also, I am extending curfew by three hours, because I’m just a nice guy like that, and the Village of Hogsmeade is forbidden to all first and second year students.

“Next, I would like to welcome five more transfer students from Durmstrang. They were all going to be sixth years at their old school, and will remain in that grade despite their late arrival at our school. I do hope that all sixth years will give them as warm a welcome as I would like.”

“Also, while we’re working on new welcomes, I would like to introduce your new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Quirrell!”

“He doesn’t mean...” started Ron.

“What happened to...” asked Hermione.

Harry looked up and saw the new Professor Quirrell that Mrs. Figg had told him about. In fact, even though they were identical twins, this Quirrell looked nothing like his brother. He had a big moustache and beard, and most obvious of all, did not have a massive turban either. He stood up, gave a small wave and smile, then sat down.

“Lastly, to try and cut this little speech of mine to as little time as possible, I have one final and major announcement. After the Christmas Holidays, and at the beginning of January, most of the school, that is, the second years and up, will go on a field trip to one of the Egyptian pyramids, the Geb Pyramid. I hope that it shall be a most wonderful and educational experience.”

The Hall suddenly filled with chatter and excitement. They would be going on a magical field trip! The first one that this set of students would have ever experienced! However, amongst the excited talk, Ron’s comment was heard by Harry.

“Field trip?” he swallowed. “They don’t mean the one that my sister never returned from... could they?” Harry didn’t know what to say. Could it possibly be to the same place?

“I... don’t know,” said Harry quietly.

“The field trip,” continued Dumbledore, trying to keep his voice heard over the cloud of chatter that was going on, “will be paid for by the school, so none of you have to worry about giving us any money to go. With that in mind, I hope you all will sign up for it, and come. We

would like everyone, who is allowed, to go with us, and we have taken many precautions this time to ensure everybody's safety.. Now, please, finish your meals and end this beginning day."

Dumbledore sat down, but nobody really noticed any difference. They were all still talking about the field trip.

"Wow! I've never been to Egypt before!"

"I wonder if there'll be any mummies."

"I didn't know Professor Quirrell had a brother...." Were just a few things that Harry picked up.

"Why is everyone so excited about a field trip?" asked Ak. "At Durmstrang, we had them all the time! We went to Transylvania, Rome, Hungary, India, China, Japan, and more! All in the same year!"

"Well this is the first one we'll have ever been to," explained Harry.

"Hmm, I see. Well, it should be good," he shrugged. "We never did go to Egypt before. Maybe it will be interesting."

"Come on Harry!" said Hermione, pulling on his shirt. "You have to go show the new students where their dormitories are."

"Yeah, yeah," sighed Harry, leaving the Great Hall with a giant mass of students following behind him. He ran ahead of them all, wanting to be able to show the new kids where to go before they got lost.

"Follow me," Harry said to them as they ran to keep up with his quick pace. They soon reached the Gryffindor room entrance that was vigilantly guarded by the portrait of the Fat Lady.

"Password?" she demanded.

"Pookong," said Harry, causing her to swing open and reveal to them the room. Over the summer, he along with the rest of the prefects had received letters telling them the passwords for the entire year. Harry led the two new first years to their room, relieved that there were only two of them this year. They both quickly settled into their new room, much more easily than the previous year's had, and Harry shut the door.

"Hello Harry," said Ak, who appeared behind him just as he closed the door.

"Ah!" gasped Harry. "You- you scared me there Ak."

"Sorry," he said. "But... where do I sleep?" Harry stroked his chin for a second. He Didn't know where Ak should go. With him and the rest of the sixth years, or with the new first years?

"Well," guessed Harry, "I suppose you can come with us. Follow me." Harry lead him to their dormitory, opened the door, and was surprised to see that there was an extra bed in the room, just for Ak. Evidently, this was where he was supposed to be.

"Hey Harry!" called Ron, whom Harry wasn't surprised to see was already involved in a Wizard Duel card game match against Dean and Seamus. "You want to play? How about you Ak?"

"Oh no, I can't," said Harry, remembering the note Dumbledore had sent to him, saying that he had something for him. "I have to go see Dumbledore... I'll be back soon."

"Don't worry Harry," said Ak. "Give me your deck and I'll play for you."

"But, you have so many cards," said Harry. "Why do you need my deck?"

"I... I don't want to reveal what my cards are until the club starts," said Ak.

"Fine," sighed Harry, reaching into the bag in the front of his bed that had been bought up earlier for his deck of cards. He found it quickly, and threw it to Ak, running out of the room as fast as he could, not wanting to be late.

Harry shot out of the room, trying to make up for the time he lost showing the new students around. He quickly made it out of the common room, and down to the Great Hall. From there, it was only a little ways to Dumbledore's office, and Harry got there quickly.

"Monkey cakes," gasped Harry, out of breath. The gargoyle in front of his office moved aside and Harry walked through the door and up the stairs.

"I'm sorry I'm late," said Harry, reaching the office, "but you see I—" He suddenly stopped. Dumbledore wasn't in the room. "Hmm, I guess I didn't have to go that fast after all."

Harry looked around. Even though he had been to Dumbledore's office on many occasions, for every imaginable type of situation, even to steal a phoenix, Harry still liked to see what was in the office. There was always something new! Just then, Harry felt the same, hot sensation on his ring finger that he had felt on the train. His ring turned blue this time, and he felt as though he were being drawn towards Dumbledore's desk.

Harry let his ring drag him, as if it were a powerful magnet. His hand was out in front of him, and it led him right towards the bottom right drawer of the desk. The ring was burning hotter now, and Harry had to resist the urge to pull it off. Harry slowly opened the drawer, wondering what he would find. The second he opened it a crack, a blue light shone right through. Harry pulled it open even more, and an explosion of blue light came out. He looked in for the source and it was... a watch.

But it wasn't just any watch... it was the most beautiful watch Harry had ever seen in his life. It was made out of a light blue crystal all over, and the face was some sort of rainbow colored glass that was constantly swirling and changing.... Harry just had to pick it up and put it on!

He reached inside the drawer, and grabbed the watch, pulling it out. He looked at for only a second, for an instant later, a giant holographic map suddenly appeared before him, and it took him by such surprise, he dropped the watch. The map was being projected right onto the air... from Harry's ring! It was a map of the world... but with no border lines at all, just geographic features. Harry scanned it over and noticed something... there were four dots on the map: a blue one, a red one, a yellow one, and a green one. The blue, green, and yellow dots were both over England...but Harry couldn't see exactly where. The red one was somewhere in... Africa.

Suddenly, Harry heard someone coming up the creaky stairs... Dumbledore! Harry quickly threw the watch back into the drawer and shut it just as fast. Just when it was out of sight, the holographic map disappeared and Harry jumped up, trying to look as though nothing out of the normal had just happened. Not even a second later, Dumbledore walked in the office.

"Hello Harry," he said, walking in. "So sorry I'm late, just had to go over a few things with Professor Quirrell."

"Oh... no problem," gasped Harry, trying to put on a smile.

"Are you alright? You look as though you've been working rather hard. Not that I have any objections to that, but it's not as if you should have much to do, considering school hasn't even started yet."

"Oh no, I'm fine."

"Alright then," said Dumbledore, shaking his head. "Anyway, down to business. I have another item here that was left to you."

"From my father?" asked Harry. Dumbledore shook his head.

"No, not this. This item is from your godfather."

"Sirius?"

"Yes, he is giving it to you to keep the Ministry of Magic from finding," explained Dumbledore, opening one of his other drawers, reaching inside, and taking out a small package.

He walked over to Harry and handed it to him. Harry took it, and opened it up. Inside, there was a ring... not at all like his skull one, but a clear ring that had a face carved on the translucent Stone: half human on one side, half lion on the other.

“What is it?” asked Harry.

“It is an Animagus Invisibility Ring,” said Dumbledore, sitting down in the chair before his desk. “It acts just like your Invisibility Cloak. Only now, whenever you transform, you will become invisible if you want to. A very handy thing to have.... Though I see that you already have a ring....”

With that, he jumped up and walked slowly in front of Harry. He bent over slightly, and gazed at the skull ring, as if he was entranced by it somehow.

“Oh yeah...” said Harry quietly, putting his new ring on his middle finger. He could barely even see it was there, it was so clear. Dumbledore, however, seemed more interested in Harry’s skull ring than his new one. It was odd... very odd in fact. Dumbledore was just standing there, looming over Harry and gazing at his ring, wide-eyed and practically drooling.

“Uh... I have to go now,” said Harry awkwardly. Dumbledore immediately shook his head and blinked his eyes a few times, leaving his catatonic state.

“Oh- oh yes!” he said, sitting back down, but not taking his eyes off of Harry. “Go along now, I’m sure you have more important things to do than talk to an old geezer like me.”

Harry smiled at Dumbledore and walked out of the room, wondering what had made him act that way. All the way back to his common room, he went over in his mind what could have happened in Dumbledore’s office with the blue watch... what was with the map and everything? He almost walked right into the portrait of the Fat Lady, not thinking. He gave her the password, and had to work his way through a cloud of students, who Harry supposed was just gathered there to talk excitedly and anxiously about the upcoming year. When he saw what the real cause was, though, he felt a little disgusted.

“Now what cards would you like?” asked Aylar behind a table that was covered several inches high in sickles and knuts. “Any card you want, I can give it to you.”

“I’d like a Merlin,” squeaked the kid, who looked like he was a third year.

“Coming right up!” smirked Aylar, waving his wand and causing the card to appear out of thin air, right onto the surface of the table. “That will be... seven sickles please.” The kid quickly reached into his pocket and threw the money out on the table, walking away in a blissful state. “Next!”

“Aylar!” yelled Harry. “What are you doing?”

“Oh hello Harry,” smiled Aylar as his next customer approached. “Just giving these kids a few cards that they have trouble getting their hands on if they only buy packs.”

“But Aylar... that’s counterfeiting!”

“I guess so... but who can tell the difference?” he shrugged, creating four phoenixes for his customer. Harry grabbed one from the air, and took a spare card out from his pocket, to compare them. After a quick glance, Harry saw a big difference.

“Sorry Aylar,” grinned Harry, showing him the two cards side by side. “But, in the bottom left hand corner of the real card, there’s a ‘T’. On yours, there’s an ‘A’.” Aylar snatched the cards out of his hand, and looked them over quickly, his eyes darting from side to side.

“I guess the first letter of the name of the person that made the card is put there,” said Aylar quietly, not wanting that little thing to get out.

“But look!” exclaimed Aylar’s customer who was waiting for the phoenix that Harry took, and had overheard them. He took out a werewolf card from his pocket.

“Yeah... so?”

“This one’s got a ‘V’ in the corner,” he said. Then, taking out another card. “And this one’s got an ‘A’ too!” Aylar folded his arms and put a smug look on his face.

“So, three different people make the cards, and one of their name’s starts with ‘A’, same as mine. There’s no way anyone will be able to tell the difference! Next!” Aylar gave his previous customer his phoenix, and a new student came up.

“Four Sorceror’s Stones,” he demanded, causing Harry to sigh and walk up to his dormitory. How could Aylar do something like that? Counterfeiting cards just to make a little money. Harry opened the door to his room, and saw the three boys, Seamus, Dean, and Ak, playing Wizard Duel on the floor. Harry groaned at the sight of more cards.

“Yes! I win again!” yelled Ak, throwing his hands into the air.

“That’s the sixth time in a row!” sighed Seamus, Dean, and Ron together.

“Hey Harry!” said Ak, turning around. “Your deck’s not bad!”

“Thanks, but isn’t that enough for tonight?” suggested Harry.

“Nah,” the four of them said together.

“But we could use another player...” said Dean.

“You’re right. Hey Neville!” called Seamus. Neville was back in a corner of the room, reading a book. Seamus held up his deck for him to see. “You play?”

Neville looked up, and Harry scanned him over. He appeared completely different from last year. If Harry didn’t know Neville was his name, he would have thought they were two totally different people. Now, instead of being slightly on the large side, Neville looked stronger than the four of them put together. His hair was different too... extremely pointy. He looked more like a character from an anime cartoon than a human.

“No,” he said with a tone of superiority in his voice. “I have... things to do.”

Harry frowned at him and winced an eye. He knew that Neville was probably studying the latest Dark Curses. Ever since halfway through the last year, Neville had been a Death Eater, and his new look was probably a gift from Voldemort.

“Fine,” said Seamus, shrugging and returning to the game.

They played another round, and Ak won, of course. Ron, Seamus and Dean decided that they’d been slaughtered enough for one day, and all of them chose to stop for the night, and go to bed.

Harry laid there, still slightly awake, with ideas buzzing in his head.

“Could this field trip be the same field trip that Jamie got lost on...? What was the deal with the map thing in Dumbledore’s office...? What was Dobby trying to warn me about...?” After a while, however, Harry finally drifted off into a deep sleep.

“Harry...” came a voice, as if from far away.

“Mmmm...” he groaned back.

“Harry Potter...” it came again, louder.

“Yeah, what?” asked Harry groggily, opening his eyes. He was very surprised to see that he was not in bed, but rather standing up in the middle of the Gryffindor Common room. His glasses weren’t on, so he couldn’t see a thing, but luckily he felt them in his hand. Harry quickly put them on.

“Harry Potter,” hissed the voice again. This time, it was much closer, and sounded almost inhuman. Suddenly, Harry could make out where the voice was coming from, and even worse, whose it was. Right before him, in the middle of the common room, was Voldemort himself.

Chapter 6- New Classes

“Hello... Harry Potter,” hissed Voldemort again, caressing himself with his spider-like fingers. Unlike his followers, Voldemort looked no different than when Harry had met him last. Pale and skeleton-like skinny all over, with snake eyes and a long, flowing, black robe and cape.

Harry didn’t have time to scream or yell. He just reached into his pocket for his wand. He quickly pulled it right out, and pointed it straight at Voldemort.

“Stupefy!” he yelled. The beam shot right out from the tip of his wand... but it just passed right through Voldemort, as if he were a ghost. Voldemort gave a short laugh.

“Oh Harry,” he chortled, “don’t you think I’m smarter than that? Even though my powers are great, I still wouldn’t risk coming into Hogwarts in my actual form... yet anyways.”

“Then how are you here?” demanded Harry, still not putting his wand down.

“This... is a dream,” said Voldemort, putting his hands up, and spinning around slowly. “I am not real, not even this room; which, I might add, is a very good guess at what the Gryffindor common looks like, seeing as I’ve never been in it.”

“You mean, you created this dream?” asked Harry.

Voldemort gave a smile.

“Oh yes...” he hissed. “My powers have improved so much after you ‘gave’ me your Order last year, that I am able to do almost anything I desire.”

“If you’re so powerful, why don’t you just have an all out attack on Hogwarts then?” snapped Harry, actually curious as to why. Voldemort ignored his question, and changed the subject.

“Anyway, down to business,” he murmured.

“What do you want now?”

“I have a feeling that you know what I want... Harry,” he said, smiling. Harry’s mind raced. What did he have that he could possibly want? His Animagus Invisibility Ring? No, he could probably get one of those from somewhere else. His other ring, the skull one? Perhaps... but why didn’t he just ask for it now if that’s what he wanted? No, it had to be something else.

“Well, I can’t give it you if I don’t even know what it is that you want,” said Harry, trying to hide his ring.

“I have a feeling you know what it is I desire...” he repeated.

“Even if I knew what it was that you wanted,” spat Harry, “there’s no way I’d give it to you anyway!”

Voldemort shook his head.

“Well then... Harry Potter,” he said slowly. “Bad things will happen...” Voldemort took out his wand, and pointed it at Harry.

“Expelliarmus!” he yelled. A wave shot out of his wand that twisted and contorted the entire room as it went along. The common room became like some sort of horrible attempt at an abstract painting as it began to curve, melt, fade, and become sharper all at once. As soon as it hit Harry, he fell to the ground, unconscious.

“Harry! Get up!” came Ron’s voice over him. “Breakfast’s started now, and you don’t want to miss the first one of the year; that wouldn’t look too good!”

“Ugh... what?” groaned Harry, sitting up and seeing that everyone else was already dressed and ready for the first actual day back. He quickly jumped out of bed and over to his

trunk of clothes where he quickly picked an outfit, and threw his robes on over that. "Alright, let's go."

The two of them ran downstairs to the Great Hall where most of the school was already seated. Harry and Ron picked seats next to Hermione, and began eating.

"So, you two have any dreams last night?" she asked. Harry choked on his muffin from remembering his.

"Are you okay, Harry?" asked Ron.

"Yeah yeah," he coughed, hitting his chest. "I'm fine."

"Okay then," said Ron, "but no, Hermione, no dreams for me... a perfectly dreamless night." Harry looked enviously at his friend. He hadn't spent the night with Voldemort in the common room.

"How about you Harry?" asked Hermione. Harry looked over at her. Why shouldn't he tell her? There was no reason not to. Maybe they could help him figure out what Voldemort wanted.

"Yeah, I had a dream," said Harry. "Voldemort talked to me in the common room, and told me he wanted something from me, but he didn't say what." Harry looked at Ron and Hermione's faces, which now contained wide eyes. He was impressed, though, that they didn't flinch at him saying Voldemort's name.

"He- he talked to you?" gasped Ron.

"In the common room?" said Hermione.

"Yeah," said Harry, acting as if he had night time conversations with Voldemort every day of his life.

"Well, what did he say he wanted?" asked Ron.

"He didn't really say. He only said, 'I have a feeling you know what it is I desire.'"

"Anything else?" asked Hermione, looking serious.

"No, well, nothing else about what he wanted. And, when I refused, he said bad things will happen then."

"Ah, we've got nothing to worry about!" said Ron, waving his arm as if tossing Voldemort away. "As long as we're here in Hogwarts, under Dumbledore's constant watch, nothing could possibly happen."

Just then, the familiar flapping of wings filled that air, and all head turned to see the owls fly in through the hole in the roof, bringing the student's daily mail. However, no owls came through this time. Only hundreds of black crows, each with a dark letter in its claws.

Indifferent to the screaming going on, each crow delivered a single envelope to each student, including Harry, then quickly flew back out the way it came. Harry quickly turned it over, to see what the seal was, and felt cold all over when he saw what it was: a red skull with a green snake coming out of the mouth. That symbol could only mean one thing: recruitment notes.

"Voldemort... is sending letters... here?" gasped Ron, from under the table.

"I can't believe Dumbledore... or anyone for that matter, would let this happen!" said Hermione, right next to Ron. Harry was one of the few who had not hid.

"Still feel safe, Ron?" asked Harry, tearing up his letter, not even looking at it. By now, all the crows had left, and the students started creeping out from their hiding spots. Teachers were coming in from preparing their first lessons to try and help out.

As Harry looked around, he saw that not everyone was tearing up the letters. Some of them were slipping them in their pockets for later, others were even reading them now. Harry stared at the student body... how many of them were already Death Eaters?

“See Harry?” chuckled Neville, his letter in hand. “We have practically already won.” Harry sneered at him.

“I don’t see how anyone could become a Death Eater,” he said with extreme disgust.

“Actually, it’s quite simple, as long as you put it into perspective,” explained Neville, putting his hands in his pocket and rocking back and forth on his feet. “Here’s a simple analogy: the Dark Arts, and the Muggle drug companies. Both kill people for profit, and both are quite successful. At Muggle schools, you’re taught not to work for them, or do it, same thing here; we have Defense Against the Dark Arts, they have health class. In the Muggle world, they have companies trying to get rid of drugs, we have Aurors. But, does any of that stop Muggle children everywhere from growing up to work for them? No, not at all. All they care about is money, and it’s the same thing here, Harry. The kids see possibilities and promotion in the Dark Arts, and they flock towards it. There’s nothing you can do.”

Harry stood there for a second, both amazed at Neville’s sight and intelligence, and hating him for thinking that way. Luckily, Neville just shrugged and walked away; Harry didn’t have anything to say to him. He instead went over to Ron and Hermione and helped them up..

“Oh Harry!” exclaimed Ron, reaching into his pocket and taking out a colorful sheet of parchment. “I made this while you were gone last night.” Harry took the sheet from him. It was an advertisement for the Gryffindor House Quidditch Team this coming Friday.

“Looks good,” said Harry, eyeing the nice pictures and colors on it. “I’ll go hang it up on the bulletin board where everyone can see it.”

“Okay, but hurry back!” called Hermione after him. “We’re getting our new schedules soon!”

“I’ll be back in no time,” said Harry, running out of the Great Hall and to the magical bulletin board that wasn’t but a few feet away. He merely touched the piece of parchment to the board and it magically stuck there, expanding slightly so it would be more visible. Harry stood back to admire the work, and smiled at it.

Just then, Harry saw another kid putting an advertisement on the board. He placed it up, and it expanded as well. This one, however, looked even nicer than Ron’s. It was practically a three dimensional picture, depicting two people excitedly engaged in a Wizard Duel game. The student who put it up turned around, and Harry saw that it was Ak. He was wearing the same outfit that Tci wore last year: a long jacket with no shirt on under it.

“Hey Ak!” yelled Harry. “So you are starting the club.”

“Oh yes,” he said, turning towards Harry. “Me and the other four are.”

“Wow, the poster looks really nice,” said Harry, nodding his head. “How did you make it look so good?”

“Oh... just a few extra little things,” said Ak, admiring the poster as well. “Oh! But I see something wrong! I forgot to dot the ‘I’ on ‘Wizard’! Oh no.... Harry, do you have a quill I can borrow?”

“Sure,” said Harry, reaching into his pocket, grabbing one, and handing it to him. “Here you go.”

Ak reached over for the quill, but stopped as soon as he saw Harry’s hand. His eyes grew wide and his mouth opened slightly. He was staring at Harry’s ring.

“What- what is it?” asked Harry nervously. “Don’t you want the quill?”

“Where did you get that skull ring?” asked Ak slowly, not blinking.

“Um... Ron gave it to me,” lied Harry, not wanting to say he got it from a crazy old man back at Knockturn Alley. “He found it in a pyramid on his trip to Egypt.”

“Pyramid...” said Ak to himself, turning around, and walking away, back towards the Great Hall. “Yes....”

“Wait, Ak!” yelled Harry to him. “Don’t you want to fix the ‘I’?”

“Pyramid...” said Ak, disappearing back into the room. Harry shrugged and put the quill away. He began walking back to Ron and Hermione, all the while thinking what Ak and Dumbledore knew about his ring that he didn’t.

“Hey there!” said Ron, looking grim, and bringing Harry out of his dazed state. “You won’t believe this. Not only do we have Potions with the Slytherins still, but we also have Defense Against the Dark Arts with them too!”

“You’re kidding!” said Harry, picking up his schedule. But, it was sadly true. Even though he and Malfoy had started getting along better, he still did not feel like spending another entire class with him this year. Then, Harry noticed something else about his schedule. “What’s this? For the last period of the day, I have three things: Advanced Healing, Meteorology, and Spell Invention.”

“We have to choose which one we want,” explained Hermione.

“What, we just go to the class of our choice at the end of the day?” said Ron jokingly.

“Yep,” said Hermione, taking Ron by surprise.

“But, shouldn’t they give us more time to think about which class it is that we want?” asked Harry.

Hermione shook her head.

“No,” she said. “It’s supposed to just be a natural choice, not something influence by our family or events that happen between when we are told that we have the choice and when it comes time to choose. It is a spur of the moment thing.”

“How do you know all that?” asked Ron, slightly amazed.

“I think we both know the answer to that,” she said.

Just then, the magical bell rang throughout the school, signaling the start of school time. Harry, Ron, and Hermione strutted off to Defense Against the Dark Arts, their first class of the day. All of them were wondering how it was going to be with the Slytherins, and with their new professor. They filed into the classroom and in just a few minutes the rest of the class arrived. Surprisingly, Malfoy took a seat right next to Harry, and Crabbe and Goyle were on the other side of the room, nowhere near him. Professor Quirrell came in soon after.

“Hello everyone!” he said brightly, with his beard (that looked as though it was even bigger than Hagrid’s) going all the way down to his stomach. It was a very unpleasant shade of green all over, probably from food and stuff getting caught in it as he eats. “Now, as I have learned, in your fourth year, you learned how to deal with the Imperius Curse, then last year you learned about the Cruciatus Curse. So, this year, we will be looking at ways to protect yourselves from the final Unforgivable Curse... the Avada Kedavra Spell. But, since the spell itself is almost unavoidable, you will not be studying on how to protect yourselves from actual curse, but how to protect yourself from being drawn into the Dark Side and ever having to deal with the spell in the first place. We will be learning what makes wizards turn, and how to stop yourself from doing so... in a nutshell, what makes good wizards go bad.... Yeehaw!”

“I’d rather learn what made your beard grow so big and disgusting,” whispered Malfoy. Harry had to stifle down a laugh and he saw Ron do the same.

“Not bad Malfoy, not bad,” said Harry, commenting on his joke.

“Eh, I could do better,” he replied, cracking his knuckles.

“Hey,” said Harry, feeling as though this was actually becoming a good conversation, “why aren’t you sitting with Crabbe and Goyle?”

Malfoy shrugged his shoulders.

“I guess I kind of... grew out of them,” he said. “They just got boring with their pathetic schemes and constant grunts. We just... don’t think on the same level any longer.” Harry was liking this more and more. With Crabbe and Goyle gone, Malfoy would be desperate for some new friends... perhaps Harry could show him the light.

The rest of the class went very well. Professor Quirrell talked to them about the letters that they all received at breakfast and how that was a perfect way for them to be tempted to come over. He asked them if any of them had kept their letters, and not very surprisingly, no one raised their hand. Harry suspected that many of the Slytherins, and probably a few of the Gryffindors, had kept their letters too, but were definitely not going to admit to it, especially to a teacher.

By the end of class, Harry and Malfoy were practically as good friends as him and Ron. It was a very good feeling, befriending one of your oldest enemies. Malfoy told Harry that he wished he were a fifth year, because next year, the Sixth Years would be offering three new courses in addition to the three that they had now: Necrology, the study of bringing people back from the dead; Curses, the study of new and advanced ways to bring about horror; and Time Travel, where they’d try to figure out new ways of changing past events, and seeing the future.

“How do you know all that?” asked Harry after the bell rang.

“My father told me,” said Malfoy.

“How would he know the future of Hogwarts?” asked Harry.

Malfoy shrugged.

“I don’t know,” he said. “But I do know that if I don’t hurry, I’ll be late for Transfiguration.”

“Fine, I’ll see you later Malfoy,” said Harry.

“Yeah, see you on the Quidditch field, Potter,” yelled Malfoy, walking away. “You know... Marcus Flint finally graduated last year. I wonder who the new captain will be?”

“So what’s up with you two now?” asked Ron, preventing Harry from commenting on Malfoy’s statement.

“Oh, don’t worry Ron,” smiled Harry. “You’re still my best friend.”

“I guess having a new class with the Slytherins wasn’t so bad after all,” commented Hermione, walking along beside them. Harry happily agreed.

The rest of the classes, while okay, did not contain any new friendships like Defense Against the Dark Arts did. In Herbology, they started learning about not plants, but rather soil. Magical dirt that could be grown and formed to act like humans. It would not be until much later into the year that any of the students, even Neville, could make a perfect person.

Transfiguration was pretty good as well. Professor McGonagall began teaching them how to transform each other’s certain body parts into different things. She began by making Hermione’s arms into crab claws, and then Neville’s legs into a goat’s. The class applauded and laughed at her transfigurations, but it would be a long time before anyone would be able to do something the well.

Charms was just as good. They began learning how to set magical charm traps, like Ron pretended he did last year. There were hundreds of different kinds: ones that exploded, ones that turned their victims to Stone, and ones that even made the person fall asleep. Harry couldn’t wait to begin learning some of them.

If Harry hadn’t known better, he would have thought he was in the same Divination class as last year. Professor Trelawney did not improve much on her syllabus from last year, she only

added that they would be using Wizard Duel cards in helping them to make some predictions. That, and only that, gave Harry hope for that class to be any good.

Care of Magical Creatures, though not as exciting as last year with the dragons, was still an improvement on Divination. Though Hagrid did not know exactly which creatures they would be studying, he did say they would be looking on an average of a new one each week, and by the end of the year, they would know almost every animal in the world. It was very nice for once to not have Malfoy criticizing Hagrid every second, poking fun at him for everything he did. On the contrary, he talked to Harry most of the time, chatting about Quidditch or whatever. Malfoy was quickly becoming one of the group... if only he wasn't in Slytherin.

In Potions, everyone's favorite teacher, Professor Snape was back. Even before he started telling them what they were going to do during the year, Gryffindor had lost twenty points, Dean had an F for the semester, and Lavender ran out crying. Ahh... the teacher they all knew and loved was back.

Even with Professor Snape back, Potions did not even begin to compare to how bad History of Magic was. Even Professor Binns reading them the outline of the year was enough to make a dead person kill over again with boredom. Halfway into the class, Harry fell asleep, and did not know what they were going to do all year. Oh well, his next major test wasn't until next year's N.E.W.T.s anyway.

Now, the thing that Harry, along with the rest of the Sixth Years, was looking forward to the most came... the time for them to choose their 'bonus' class. Ron and Harry quickly consulted with Hermione on which one was the best.

"Well, Advanced Healing is pretty good if you plan on going into some sort of medicinal position, like a doctor or something. Meteorology is for those who want to go into serious fighting, you learn how to make storms and tornadoes appear out of nowhere. And, if you don't fit into either of those categories, like me, Spell Invention. You do exactly what the class name is... invent spells."

"Really?" asked Ron, sounding amazed. "You can make your own spells?"

"Yeah, but it's not as easy as it sounds," said Hermione. "They recommend having taken Arithmancy; you'll need it to understand the code behind it. MMSC, or Majik's Magical Spell Code, the code for making spells is quite similar to Muggle computer programs. That little second year, Akshay, would be good at it."

"So you're taking Spell Invention, Hermione?" asked Ron, completely ignoring everything she had just said.

"Yes, but that doesn't mean—"

"Well then I'll take it too," announced Ron, not allowing her to finish. Hermione just sighed. She didn't want to influence their decision, but she did.

"Well then, I guess I'll take it too," said Harry, not wanting to be left out.

"Fine! Don't let your subconscious self choose, let me do it for you," groaned Hermione, throwing her hands into the air.

"Okay thanks," smiled Ron. The three of them tried to find their way to their new class by using the Marauder's Map, the only good... well actually, the only map of Hogwarts that Harry had ever seen. It took them no time to find it with the help of the map, so not before long, they found their quite large classroom, and walked in to see a rather small group of students inside. Most of them were people that Harry had seen before, but never really talked to.

"Why are there so few students here?" asked Harry.

"Yeah, I thought this would be one of the more popular classes," said Ron.

“Well I did tell you,” said Hermione. “It’s not an easy class. Most people in here are from my Arithmancy class.”

Harry swallowed hard.

“Do you think we made the right choice, Ron?”

“Well, I don’t know....”

“Hey, you’ve had five other brothers go through this already, you should know,” said Harry. “Didn’t any of them take this class?” Ron stroked his chin, thinking hard.

“Well, I think Bill might have taken it... but never really went anywhere with it,” he said. “But, I was so little back then, I don’t remember if he said it was hard or not.”

“Well, do you at least know who the teacher is?”

“Um... no.”

“Hermione!” called Harry.

“Yeah?” she asked, turning her head from a group of students that she was talking excitedly to. “What is it?”

“Do you know who teaches this class?” asked Harry.

“No,” she replied as soon as the bell rang. “But, you’ll find out-”

Suddenly, the door opened, and in walked the teacher. Harry’s, along with most of the other student’s jaws fell to the floor.

“Good afternoon students,” announced their teacher. “I will be your Spell Invention teacher... my name, if you don’t already know it, is Professor Dumbledore.”

Chapter 7- The Return of The Second Years

“Dumbledore?” exclaimed the entire class together. The old man jumped back in surprise from hearing his name said by so many people at once.

“Yes, that is my name,” he said.

“You... you’re our teacher?” asked one student in surprise.

“You didn’t think all I did around here was sign papers and nod my head when people do a job well done?” he asked them. No one said a word. “So, are you saying you’re unhappy to see me?”

“No!” said everyone immediately.

Dumbledore smiled at them.

“Oh good,” he grinned. “Now, time for class to begin. I’m sure that many of you have heard that this class is extremely hard, almost impossible. Well, I can say that I am behind all of those terrible rumors, but that is just to deter as many as possible from taking this class, because not many possess the talent necessary to do this, and I don’t want a hundred little students running around with only a half idea on how to make spells. I would rather have only a handful be an expert at it.”

With that, he walked over to his desk at the front of the room, opened a drawer, and took out a small cauldron. He placed it on the top of the desk where everyone could see it.

“This,” he said, “is a Ordinator Potion. From this concoction, all spells are created, made, and altered.” He took out his wand, and pointed it at the rather calm concoction inside. “Let me show you what a simple MMSC Code looks like. Lumos!” The spell, rather than creating a small beam of light, came out as a thick cloud and flowed right into the potion, making it turn a bright yellow.

“The spell is now inside the potion, and is completely changeable. But, before we alter it just yet, let me show you what code makes this spell up in the first place. Ordinatum!” No beam came out of the wand, but a holographic screen popped right out of the potion, and projected itself into the air. It looked like a Muggle computer or television screen, only larger and perfectly flat. Then, Harry noticed, there were words on the screen:

(Light Spell)
<lumos>

[size] 1

[see] light = light + 100
[smell] none
[hear] none
[taste] none
[touch] none

Harry had no idea what it meant, but before he could try to make sense of it, Dumbledore started explaining it.

“This is the MMSC Code, the code that tells what should happen as soon as you summon this spell. At the top, in comment parentheses, is the name of the spell, and below it, in the greater than and less than signs, is what you say to use the spell. Usually, a word not heard in normal speech is used, to try and prevent people from accidentally using spells while engaging in conversation. So, words from other languages are used, mostly obscure ones like Latin, though some still prefer French, Japanese, Greek, or even English even though they are still in use today.

“Below that part is where the real fun begins. The size part tells how big the beam is. In Lumos’ case, the beam is relatively small, the standard size. The larger the beam, the more magical energy it takes to use the spell.

“And below that indicates what the spell does. The spell can produce something that you see when you use it, smell when you use it, hear when you use it or when it hits you target, taste when you eat it, or feel when you use it or when your target is it with it. Now, Lumos does not do anything except produce a beam of light, so it does not require more than a single line of code, and minimal magical energy. The ‘light = light +100’ part shows that when you use it, it creates a thin beam, as indicated by the size, that increases the light in the area of that beam by one hundred. The more lines of code that are used and the higher the numbers, the more magical energy is drained upon summoning the spell. Now, any questions?” Hermione, of course, raised her hand.

“Yes, Miss Granger.”

“Professor, how are the see, smell, hear, taste, and touch constants declared?” she asked, insightfully. “How does the spell know what they are?” .

“That,” said Dumbledore, raising his pitch, “goes all the way back to the creation of magic. As you should know from your History of Magic lessons-”

“Yeah right,” whispered Ron to Harry.

“-Majik Premer was the first wizard... ever. He spent years and years trying to invent the first spell, but he couldn’t figure out how to change the physical world without actually touching anything. It took him decades to finally figure out a way to change the five senses that we can experience, and since then, not a wizard has ever even touched the code he made that declares those constant’s values... even I can barely understand it. But, we don’t have to worry about that. All we need to do, nowadays, is to simply put in the words, and tell what should happen to that specific sense.”

“But,” continued Hermione, “if you can change what the five senses experience, then wouldn’t it be possible to change things beyond our physical grasp... like time?”

“But we can already do that,” interrupted another student. “Remember Time Turners?”

“Ah,” said Dumbledore, putting up his finger. “That is not actually true. Not many wizards know that Time Turners do not actually take you back in time, but really just change the world around us to a specific place in time. You see, every second, a Time Turner sends off an invisible wave throughout the entire universe that records everything it touches, and saves that data inside. When it is turned to return to a certain time, the Time Turner merely accesses the saved time, and ‘loads’ it into the current world by changing everything to match what it was. So, you are not really time traveling, just returning the universe to look exactly like a certain time.”

“But isn’t that just as good?” asked the same student. “I mean, what could make actual time travel superior to that?”

“Another very good point,” said Dumbledore, scratching his nose. “But if you think about it hard enough, you can find the answer quite easily. You see, a Time Turner only starts sending out waves after it has been created. So, a Time Turner cannot bring you further into the past before the time it has been created. For example, lets say you created a Time Turner on Wednesday the fourth. You wait a week, and you could return to either the tenth, ninth, eighth, seventh, sixth, fifth, or all the way back to the fourth, the day you created it. But, no matter how many times you turned it, you could not go to the third or before that.”

“But don’t we have Time Turners that go all the way back for hundreds of years?” asked the same student again, determined to try and prove her point. Dumbledore shook his head.

“No,” he said. “In fact, the Time Turner is a very recent invention. The latest someone could go back is about... thirteen years I think.”

“So that’s why Voldemort didn’t just get one of his Death Eaters to use a Time Turner and go back and stop him from going to your house,” whispered Ron to Harry. “They hadn’t been invented yet!”

“So,” said Hermione, trying to wrap up the entire discussion, “if someone were to figure out a way to declare time as a constant, a person would be able to travel backwards and forwards through time as he or she pleased?”

“Yes,” said Dumbledore, giving a grin, and showing a twinkle in his eye, “the development of such a thing would be the greatest invention ever in the history of magic, except for its actual invention.”

For the rest of the class, Dumbledore showed the students various spells and their MMSC code. He showed them a few more not very complex spells (like Wingardium Leviosa) and some very sophisticated offensive spells (like Stupefy and Porcini Magus). He said they would all, by the end of the year, be able to create spells like these, and everyone was anxious to try and make their own. To get them all excited, he showed them the MMSC of one of his own spells, the

Anata Naru Spell, an unavoidable spell that allowed you to switch bodies with someone else. Harry was going to ask if he could try it out, but the bell rang and everyone returned to their common rooms, to do their Potions Homework.

The first week of school went by very quickly and before Harry knew it, Friday arrived, bringing with it the tryout for the Gryffindor Quidditch Team. After classes had ended, Harry, along with Ron, walked out to the Quidditch Field, where the tryout would be held. When they arrived, there were ten people, ready to go. Much to Harry's dismay, the first years he had helped last year as a Prefect were all there, just as they had said.

"Hey Harry!" called Chris, the most athletic of them all.

"We've been practicing all summer long!" said Mike.

"And now we're really good!" squeaked Akshay, flexing his tiny muscles.

"I LIKE THE QUAFFLE!" grunted Joe, running after the red ball.

"Ron," whispered Harry. "We can't risk having any of them on the team."

"What should we do then?"

Harry thought for a second.

"I know," he said, "let's just have a Quidditch match. Two Beaters, two Chasers, and a Keeper to each time, five on five. First to... oh say... one hundred wins, and the winning team makes it, and the losers go away."

"But how will that help us get rid of them quickly?" asked Ron.

"Well, we'll make one of them the captain of one of the two teams. That one will surely pick the rest of his friends, and then that team will lose."

"But what about the poor guy who gets stuck with the four of them for tryouts?" asked Ron.

Harry shrugged.

"Oh well," said Harry. "All victories have some sort of sacrifice."

"Yeah, sounds good."

"Alright!" announced Harry to the hopefuls, clearing his throat. "We've decided... after much talk and deliberation... that the best way to hold this tryout would be to have a Quidditch match. Two Beaters, two Chasers, and a Keeper to each team. First to one hundred wins, and the winning team makes the official Gryffindor one. Got it?"

"Yes!" said the ten of them together.

"Alright," said Harry, putting his arms akimbo. "Who wants to be a captain of a team?"

"OOOHHH! ME!" screamed Joe, bouncing up and down and throwing his hands into the air. Harry stifled down a laugh.

"Alright Joe," he said, pointing to him, "you're up!"

"Yahoo!" he yelled, running up next to Harry.

"Who else?" demanded Harry.

"How about me?" asked Akshay, putting his hand up.

"Uh... no," said Harry. If two of the boys that he didn't want to make the team came up, that would ruin his plan. "How about... you! Dean! Come on up." Dean Thomas shrugged, and walked up on the other side of Harry.

"Alright Joe, you start."

"I choose... Chris!" yelled Joe. Chris walked up next to him.

"Dean?"

"I'll have... Seamus!"

"Chris?"

“Mike!”

“Seamus?”

“Dennis!” Harry was surprised to see Dennis Creevey try out... especially with what happened to his brother last year.

“Mike?”

“Akshay!”

“Dennis?”

“Natalie!”

“Akshay?”

“Aku!”

“Aku! WHERE!?” yelled Mike, jumping up.

“What are you talking about?” asked Harry, feeling sorry for Ak that he was on their team and was now unofficially out of the running.

“Oh...” said Mike, calming down. “It’s just that... well, never mind.”

“Okay...” said Harry, turning back. “Natalie, who do you want?”

“Emma, the only one left!” S

She skipped up and high fived Natalie.

Harry stood back and looked at the two teams. Now, that he saw them both, neither was really all too desirable. He wished he could just have Fred, George and everyone else back instead.

“Okay!” yelled Ron, rubbing his hands together. “Teams, figure out your positions and Joe, your team goal will be the one on the left and you’re team name will be the uh...”

“THE ELITES!” he barked.

“Okay, your team name will be the Elites...” said Ron, wincing. “And your team, Dean, your goal will be down to the right. Your team name will be...”

“The Wizard Duelers!”

“Excellent name,” said Ron, grinning. He and Harry waited for the two teams to arrive at their positions and decided who would be playing as what.

“You guys ready!?” called Harry to them.

“Yeah!” the both teams yelled back.

“Alright then!” yelled Ron, opening the box of balls, and releasing the two Bludgers. Since there would be no Seekers in this match, the Snitch was unnecessary. “Three... two... one... go!” He opened the straps for the Quaffle and it flew straight into the middle of the match.

“And they’re off!” yelled Harry, magically magnifying his voice so the players could hear. “And it’s... Joe in possession?” It was true. Through he didn’t look like much, Joe shot for the Quaffle faster than any other player and grabbed it before the match was even a quarter second old.

“Don’t worry,” said Ron. “Seamus will stop him.” Harry looked over and saw Seamus shooting right at Joe, looking ready to knock him off. Harry smiled... but then, right at the last second, Joe threw the Quaffle right into the air, flew under Seamus, and since Seamus was distracted by this, Mike easily flew in and grabbed the Quaffle and shot it into the goal, scoring the Elites the first ten points of the game. Harry’s jaw fell to the ground.

“Wow, they’re good,” said Ron.

Harry jabbed him in the side.

“Okay, the score is ten to zero, with the Elites ahead. Come on Wizard Duelers!”

The wizards Duelers were trying their best, but were being badly beaten by the Elites. It was almost scary, how the four of them seemed to be linked telepathically or something; the way

the coordinated their movements... it was almost scary. Harry, for a few minutes, suspected that Ak was helping them with his magic, but he kept a close eye on him in his Keeper position, and his wand was in his pocket at all times. Now, just five minutes into the game, the score was ninety to zero.

“Harry... I don’t think your plan is working,” smiled Ron.

Harry glared at him.

“I think the Wizard Duelers are do for a comeback,” he said, returning his attention to the field. Chris suddenly whacked a Bludger in the direction of the Wizard Dueler’s goals, and Emma, mistaking it for a Quaffle went after it. This left Mike wide open to pass to Akshay, who was already by that goal, and easily dropped the Quaffle into the goal, scoring Gryffindor their last and final ten points that they needed to win even before Emma realized the mistake she had made.

“Hey!” called Joe, flying down in front of Harry. “We won!”

Harry sighed.

“Yes... yes you did.”

“Hey,” whispered Ron, “they may be a bit crazy, but hey, they’re good!”

“I suppose you’re right....” moaned Harry. “Hey, Wizard Duelers... good try.” Harry waved to the losing tam as they miserably walked back inside the castle. The rest of the Elites flew down next to Joe.

“I told you we’ve been practicing,” said Akshay, giving Mike a high five.

“Yeah, well, you won,” said Harry, folding his arms. “So now, you have to do it again... in our first match against Ravenclaw. Think you’re up to it?”

“Yeah!” said the five of them.

“Alright. Ak, you played Keeper, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Alright, well, we’ve already got a Keeper, and you look like you’re more built for action. So, you’ll be one of our Beaters. Chris, you too. You’re as good as Fred or George. As for you three others, Mike, Akshay, and Joe, you’ll be the Chasers. I haven’t seen such awesome cooperation between Chasers since the last World Cup.”

“Thanks,” they said.

“Alright,” said Harry, trying to look at his team for their playing ability, not how he personally felt. “Meet back here every night after classes. You’ll practice your new positions and who knows... we may win.”

“Yay!” yelled the four first years, throwing their brooms into the air.

“Okay... bye,” said Harry quickly, walking back up to the castle with Ron while listening to the excited chatter among the four of them.

“Hey!” Harry heard Ak call.

“Yeah?”

“Our first Wizard Duel meeting is tonight... in just a few minutes in fact. You coming?”

“Of course!” said Ron, looking thoroughly excited.

“Alright!” said Ak, running ahead of them back to the castle.

“Harry!” came a voice again.

“What is it?” asked Harry in an annoyed voice. He expected to see one of the second years, but it was actually Professor McGonagall. “Oh, I’m so sorry professor! You see-”

“It’s quite alright Harry,” she said, waving her hand. Harry noticed, this was one of the first few times she had called him by his first name. The previous time was when he asked her if he could become an Animagus.... What did she have to say.

“A letter just came for you,” she said, breathing hard and taking a rather large envelope out of her pocket.

“Why didn’t Hedwig just bring it to me?” he asked.

“This one was not delivered by a magical owl,” she said, giving him the letter. “It was sent by a Muggle owl. Though they are still competent letter senders, they are not very good at delivering them to specific people. Luckily, I saw it hooting outside a window. The poor thing didn’t know what to do.”

“Who’s it from?”

“Look for yourself,” she said. Harry turned the envelope over, and to his surprise, the return address was to Dudley!

“Dudley sent me a letter!” he cried in surprise.

“Yes, that’s why I wanted to bring it to you personally,” continued Professor McGonagall. “It was probably important.”

“Thanks professor,” said Harry, continuing on his walk back up the castle and shaking the envelope. From the sound of it, there was definitely something inside... but what could Dudley have sent him?

“Anytime,” she called to him, sounding a little breathless. She began walking back as well. Harry and Ron ran all the way to the Gryffindor Common Room, unable to wait much longer to see what was inside. What could Dudley have possibly sent him? When the two of them arrived in the common room, they walked over to a corner, and opened it up.

“What’s that?” asked Hermione, coming over to them.

“Something from Dudley,” said Harry, trying to shake whatever was inside it out.

Hermione made a face of surprise.

“What’s he doing sending you stuff?”

“I dunno, but it must be imp-” Harry stopped there, and it seemed as if the whole world froze. When he saw what had fallen out of the bag and onto the floor, someone could have knocked him over with a feather, and he probably would have turned to dust from the impact. Right there, before the three of them, was a Sorcerer’s Stone.

Chapter 8- The First Match

It looked exactly like the one Harry had found in his first year at school. It was a transparent gold all over with a shiny, red center. Harry’s eyes widened and he began to drool from looking at it. With this, he could have all the money he’d ever wanted, and live forever....

“Oh... my... god....” gasped Ron, not blinking.

“What is Dudley doing?” said Hermione softly, not taking her gaze off of it either. “Does he have a collection of these at home or what? Where did he get that from!?”

“I... don’t know,” said Harry, doing the same as the other two, standing there, transfixed onto it.

“Well didn’t a note come with it or something?” asked Hermione, still not raising the volume of her voice in the least. Harry dug into the bag and felt a small sheet of parchment. He quickly ripped it out, and read it aloud softly to the two of them. He didn’t want anyone else in the room to hear.

Dear Harry,

Remember how we went to see that lady in the funeral home that day during the summer? Well, as it turns out, she was actually someone very important... in your world that is. I think her name was Perenelle Flamel. Does that name ring a bell? Oh well.

Anyway, it seems as though this Stone was her most prized possession and she decided to leave it to whoever bothered to show up at her funeral. Seems as though she's not very popular with the rest of her family... it said in the will that the funeral home sent me that she wouldn't share her Stone with the rest of her family, trying to keep some sort of 'immortality spell' as she called it off of them. Said she'd give it to whoever went through the little trouble of finding where her funeral was. Weird, huh?

Anyway, I hope this letter gets to you. I had to steal this owl from the biology room at my school and I think I told it to deliver it to you. Oh, by the way, try to send him back as soon as possible, so I don't get in trouble and because we need owl pellets for a test on Wednesday.

Dudley

"That lady was Nicholas Flamel's wife!" said Harry, lowering his voice from a yell to a whisper, realizing how loud he was talking before.

"She has her own Sorcerer's Stone?" asked Ron.

"And Dumbledore didn't destroy it?" gasped Hermione.

"Maybe she hid it," guessed Ron "No wonder she stayed alive longer than her husband; he died last year."

"Speaking of Dumbledore," said Harry, "we have to give this to him."

Ron and Hermione looked up at him.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"Couldn't we just make a little gold?" begged Ron.

"No way!" said Harry, snatching it from off the ground. "If we do that-" Suddenly, the same holographic map shot out of Harry's ring and into the air. It was massive, depicting the entire world, and someone could see it!

"Get down!" yelled Harry, pushing Ron and Hermione's heads to the ground, and shining the map onto the floor. He looked up for a second... no one had seen it. He breathed a quick sigh of relief.

"What is that?" asked Ron and Hermione together, gazing at the map.

"I- I'm not sure," said Harry, looking at it too.

"What are those?" asked Ron, pointing to the four colored dots.

"Like I said... I don't know yet," said Harry, trying to keep his voice down.

"You mean, you've seen this map before?" asked Hermione.

Harry swallowed hard

"Yes. Once before, in Dumbledore's office."

"His office? Why there? What triggered it?"

"I don't know," said Harry, letting go of the Stone, "I just touched this watch and-" Harry suddenly noticed that the map had disappeared.

"Harry... touch the Stone again..." said Hermione quietly. Slowly, Harry reached his finger out, until it touched the Stone. The closer it got, the more Harry's finger burned, and the brighter it shone green. The instant Harry touched it, the map appeared again. He took his finger off, it disappeared, touched it, it reappeared, let go, it went away.

“So the Stone is what triggers it,” said Ron.

“No,” said Harry, standing up and putting the Stone in his pocket. “I didn’t touch a Stone in Dumbledore’s office. It was a watch.”

“Maybe it was made out of tiny Sorcerer’s Stones,” suggested Ron.

“Ron,” said Hermione exasperantly, “how many Sorcerer’s Stones do you think there are in the world?”

Ron shrugged.

“A lot?”

“No,” said Hermione. “This one isn’t even supposed to be here. There’s certainly not enough to make a watch out of. What I’d like to know is... what is that map?”

“And what the dots are for,” added Ron.

“Well, we can ask Dumbledore all about that when we see him in the office,” said Harry. “Let’s go. We may still be able to make the Wizard Duel meeting if we leave now.”

Hermione rolled her eyes.

“Yeah, I agree with Harry,” said Ron, suddenly interested upon hearing that Wizard Duel was involved. “Let’s go!” The three of them walked to Dumbledore’s office, their heads buzzing and on the verge of explosion. How were the Stone and the ring linked? What was that map? What did it show the locations of? Suddenly, when they were walking down a hallway, Ak jumped out in front of them.

“Harry! Ron!” he yelled. “Get in here! You’re going to miss the meeting!”

“Err...” mumbled Harry, wanting to get to Dumbledore as fast as possible. “We... have to go somewhere.”

“What place could be more important at this time than here?” asked Ak, shocked.

“Nothing!” said Ron, pushing his way in front of the two of them. “In fact, we were headed here right now!”

“Ron!” whispered Harry angrily. They had more pressing matters.

“We can go see Dumbledore anytime,” whispered Ron back. “This club only meets... what? A few times a year?”

“Yeah, that’s about right,” said Ak, obviously hearing them.

“Exactly. Let’s go!”

“Fine...” agreed Harry. “But only for a while!”

“Alright alright,” said Ron, grabbing his deck out of his pocket and running into the room. Harry and Hermione followed him inside and Harry was surprised to see that besides the five new students, there were only two other students in the room, and Harry had never seen either of them before. Evidently, the club hadn’t been as popular here as the new students had hoped.

“Where is everyone?” asked Ron. Ak shrugged.

“We’re hoping the club will pick up by the second meeting,” he said. “But, no matter right now. Let’s get this meeting underway. Harry, you and I will play a little exhibition game, just to show Hermione and these other two here how to play. Are you up to that?”

“Oh yeah,” said Harry, taking out his deck and sitting down on the floor. Ak gave out a laugh. “What’s so funny?”

“Harry,” he said, “we do not play on the floor! No... we have something specially prepared for the club.” Ak walked over and opened a closet in the room. From it, he brought a small table that looked relatively normal, except for a small hole in each corner. Ak set it down in front of Harry, and beckoned him to sit.

“Put your deck of cards in the hole in the corner,” said Ak. Harry followed his instruction and slid it in. It fit perfectly. Then, just as the deck slid in, Harry’s side of the table began to glow, and his deck shone brightly. When Ak put his in, his side of the table did the same as well.

“What is this?” asked Harry, amazed.

“It is a holographic dueling table,” said Ak. “Instead of just battling with cards, you battle with the real things.... Makes for a much more interesting game.” Harry gazed at the table, wanting more than anything to see how this was going to look. Suddenly, five figures appeared before Harry: a wand with a Stupefy Spell coming out, another Stupefy, a Merging Spell, a Disarming Spell, a Quick-Attack Spell, a phoenix, and a house elf.

“What is this?” asked Harry again.

“Oh, that’s your starting hand,” said Ak. “It is automatically dealt to you, along with the card you get at the beginning of each turn.”

“But, you can see the cards in my hand!” gasped Harry.

“Can you see mine?” asked Ak, smiling. Harry looked over. Apparently, the holographic cards in you hand were only visible to you. “Here, I’ll go first...to show you how to play with this new thing.”

“Alright,” said Harry, looking at his house elf that was playing with his phoenix. They looked incredibly realistic, only they were about four inches high.

“Alright! Listen up!” called Ak to the group. “Watch us, and you’ll find out how to play the game!” All of the kids walked over, and surrounded the table. “As most of you know, you get two actions per turn, and an action is either playing a fighter, an effect, using a fighter’s ability, or drawing an additional card. For my turn, I will use my first action by playing a fighter: Boggart!”

Ak reached and grabbed hold of one of the cards in his hand that were invisible to Harry. He picked it up, and placed it on the field. There was a flash of light in the spot he chose for a second, then the Boggart appeared in its normal form: a floating blob.

“For my next action,” continued Ak, “I will draw an additional card. Since you can only attack at the beginning of your turn, and I have used my two actions, my turn is now over. Harry, you may begin.”

“Thank you Ak,” said Harry, trying not to laugh at him explaining in detail each move that he made. The table automatically drew his card for him; it was a pensieve. The blue, smoking cauldron looked like a miniature version of a real one. After thinking for a second, Harry made his first move.

“For my first action,” began Harry, “I will play a phoenix.” Following what Ak did, Harry grabbed hold of his holographic phoenix that way busy flapping its fiery wings, picked it up, and placed it on the field. There was a small burst of color, and it appeared in the spot he had placed it. Immediately, the boggart turned into a phoenix too, due to its special ability.

“Next, I will play a stupefy spell on Ak’s boggart.” Harry picked up the holographic wand with the green spell coming out, and placed it on the Boggart. After the colors flashed, Ak’s boggart returned to its normal form, and fell onto the table from its hovering position. It wasn’t quite dead, but severely wounded, and unable to attack.

“Nice move there, Harry,” said Ak. “But, it’s my turn now!” The table drew his card for him. “I choose not to attack with my boggart, since it is so weak, would be slaughtered by Harry’s phoenix, and it is unable to due to the Stupefy Spell having been played one it. So, I will begin my turn by playing a Flobberworm card.” He dragged the it onto the table, and the pathetic grub appeared. Suddenly, the Boggart disappeared. “And, playing Flobberworm requires that I discard one of my fighters in play, so my boggart is gone.”

“Hah, what a waste,” said Harry. Flobberworm was a very pathetic card. It had almost no power, and it cost you a fighter to play. Ak was worse than he had thought.

“That’s what you think,” smiled Ak. “But, I still have another action. I will play... Cloning Chamber!” Ak dragged it out into the field of play, and a small, metallic box appeared that was giving off smoke and bouncing up and down a little.

“What does that do?” asked Harry, having never seen that card before.

Ak smiled.

“It’s a very rare card,” he grinned. “At the beginning and end of each of my turns, I get to make a copy of a creature that I have that has a power of one. So, Harry, meet my other worm.” The Cloning Chamber made a small explosion sound, and a second Flobberworm appeared next to the other. “Your turn Harry.”

“Yeah yeah, two Flobberworms is still is nothing,” he said, the table giving him his next card: another pensieve. “Now, I attack one of your worms.” Harry’s phoenix dived at the worm, causing it to burst into flames and turn into a small pile of ash that quickly disappeared. Harry smiled. This was Wizard Duel as it was meant to be played.

“Now, I shall play a house elf,” announced Harry, dragging it out and making it appear. “And, I shall use a Merging Spell to combine my phoenix and house elf into a superior creature.” Harry moved the spell over the two fighters and they both shone brightly for a second and then melted together. After giving off a quick, white flash, the new creature appeared: a house elf that had extra-long phoenix wings and four, flaming arms.

“Your turn Ak,” said Harry, trying to sound menacing and intimidating. But, it wasn’t working. Ak looked as calm and cool as he ever did. He merely allowed the table to give him his card, and then began his turn. Immediately, another Flobberworm appeared on the table, due to the Cloning Chamber.

“Alright... I shall begin by playing... another cloning chamber!” He dragged it out, right next to the other one. Harry felt a single drop of sweat come down his forehead. Now the Flobberworms would quadruple twice during his turn....

“Then, I will draw a another card, ending my turn, and I gain six more worms,” said Ak. As soon as the word left his mouth, six new Flobberworms appeared, making for a grand total of eight. “Your turn.”

“Yeah yeah,” said Harry, trying to remain calm with the gaze of the eight other members of the club on him. His new fighter, the half house elf and phoenix attacked one of the Flobberworms, lowering the number by one. Harry drew his card: another pensieve! He had to get rid of some of those later.

“Alright,” began Harry, “I’m going to play a disarming spell on one of the Cloning Chambers!” Harry dragged his card over the Chamber, and watched it disappear, right into Ak’s discard pile. “Good, one down. Now, I’ll play a pensieve.” The bowl appeared on the board, appearing to have the mystery liquid in it too.

“My turn,” said Ak, still not looking shaken. He drew his card, fourteen new Flobberworms appeared, and he gave a wide smile. “Well then, for my first action, I shall play another Cloning Chamber!” He dragged it out and it appeared, taking away some of Harry’s hope with it. “Then for my second action... yet another Cloning Chamber!”

Harry’s mouth dropped, and he heard some laughs from the observing crowd as it appeared in play. “I’ll end my turn now... and gain sixty three more Flobberworms!” They all appeared, now as a pyramid of Flobberworms, stacked on top of each other, peaking at about a foot high. They were making the most horrible sucking sound and giving off some sort of

horrible liquid that flowed all the way down the side and onto the surface of the table. Whether you were fighting it or in control of it, it was not a pleasant sight

Harry swallowed hard and began his turn. If all of those attacked his half-house elf-half-phoenix fighter, it would be killed instantly, allowing Ak to deal all the damage directly to his deck the next turn, and annihilate him. He had to find a way to protect his card and his deck... then he remembered! The pensieves! After his fighter attacked and killed a single Flobberworm, Harry drew his card (a Stupefy) and began his plan.

“For my first action, I will put my fighter into my pensieve.” The half-house elf-half-phoenix disappeared, and the pensieve turned red. “Just so that you know,” said Harry, talking to the crowd who didn’t know as much as he or Ak, “a pensieve, when you put a fighter into one, gains power equal to the fighter’s power, but it cannot attack, only defend. When the pensieve dies, the fighter you put in it comes out unscathed.”

“Yeah yeah, keep going with your turn,” said Ak, looking very satisfied with himself.

“And for my last action, I will play another pensieve.” Harry moved it out and watched it appear right next to his other one. He would have to stall for a while until he could find a way to wipe out all of the Flobberworms at once or kill the Cloning Chambers.

“My turn!” said Ak excitedly, getting his card. As soon as it went into his hand, two hundred and fifty two more Flobberworms appeared on the table. “First of all, I will attack with all of my Flobberworms!” The mass of grubs, after vibrating for a few seconds, fell over right onto Harry’s pensieve with his fighter inside, making it break open, and his half-house elf-half-phoenix to come out. “Now, even though I don’t need to, for my actions, I will play two Cloning Spells on my Flobberworms, doubling them each time, giving me a total of... one thousand three hundred and forty-four! Now, I end my turn, and get an additional four thousand thirty two!”

The amount of worms was almost overwhelming. The pile went ten feet off of the table now, and took up most of the surface of it, except for a small area designated for Harry’s two cards. Ak gave a superior-looking smile.

“Don’t get too cocky,” said Harry, trying to sound cool, and drawing his card (an Avada Kedavra curse... useless against the Flobberworms). Harry played his other pensieve, and put his fighter into one of them, trying to stall for more time... something had to happen to turn the tides of this battle!

But, it was now Ak’s turn, and he got an additional sixteen thousand, one hundred twenty-eight bugs. He attacked the pensieve, breaking it, and forcing the fighter out. Ak skipped his actions, just wanting to get this battle with as soon as possible. He got sixty four thousand, five hundred twelve more.

“That Cloning Chamber card should be banned,” commented Harry, attacking one of them with his half-house elf-half-phoenix.

“Oh Harry,” laughed Ak behind his ever growing pile of grotesqueness. “That card is so rare... I’m probably the only person on Earth with four of them. I’ve had to trade away most of my collection to get them from other players.”

“Yeah yeah, sure.” Harry drew his card, and was happy to see it wasn’t another Stupefy, it was a Sap Strength Spell. “For my first action, I will use The Sap Strength Spell, allowing me to improve one of my fighter’s power by one per fighter my opponent has in play. My target is obviously the half-house elf-half-phoenix, making his power... eighty thousand, and twenty six.”

“What’s the point?” laughed Ak. “Even if your fighter has a million power, it can still only attack one fighter at a time!”

“Yeah, I know,” groaned Harry. This was his last turn to stall... something had to happen soon. “Then, I will put my fighter into my last pensieve, and end my turn.” Ak shrugged, and

drew his card. He attacked the pensieve, breaking it, and forcing the high powered half-house elf-half-phoenix out. His pile of grubs tripled, he skipped his actions, and then it doubled again... giving an insane amount of Flobberworms... seven-hundred and seventy-four thousand, one hundred forty-four.

It was now Harry's turn, and all eyes were on him. All of his pensieves were gone and he had to get something good this turn or else his fighter would be destroyed and he would lose the turn afterwards. Harry closed his eyes, and hoped for a miracle.... The table gave him his card.

Harry breathed a sigh of relief, and gave a massive smile.

"For my first action!" announced Harry, feeling great at the promise of victory. "I shall play... Voldemort!" There were a few shrieks of surprise and fear when Voldemort appeared on the field, in all his horrible glory compressed into four inches. Harry saw Ak's eyes grow wide. "And as you obviously know, Ak, Voldemort has a special ability. When he comes into play, all fighters that your opponent controls are sent to the discard pile! Goodbye Flobberworms!" In an instant, the pile of Flobberworms that was practically overflowing off of the table and bursting through the rood disappeared, allowing Harry to get a better view of Ak's terrified face.

"And for my last action, I shall use the Quick-Attack Spell on my half-house elf-half-phoenix fighter. And, Ak, since you have no other fighters out, all the damage goes directly to your deck, making all your cards in it go to the discard pile, and causing you to lose the game!"

"Yay!" cheered Hermione.

"Go Harry!" yelled Ron, throwing his hands into the air.

"I... lost..." gasped Ak, letting his forehead fall into his hands. All the lights and cards on the table disappeared and Harry removed his deck from the slot.

"Good game," he said to Ak, offering his hand. Ak stood up, brushed himself off, and shook Harry's hand, trying to force a smile.

"Yeah, good game," he said. "You know, that was my first lost... ever."

"Well, first time for everything," said Harry. Then, checking his watch, "Oh! I'm sorry Ak, but we've got to go, we're terribly late!"

"Yeah," whispered Ak, looking through his cards. "Go ahead."

"Alright," called Harry, walking out the door with Ron and Hermione following behind him. "See you later!" When they walked out of the room, Harry heard all of the kids in the classroom suddenly burst into chatter, talking about the match, and wanting to start some games of their own.

"Wow," said Ron, "you were saved by Voldemort.... The irony is overwhelming."

"Shut up," said Harry. He hoped he didn't hurt Ak too badly.

"Oh don't worry Harry," said Hermione, as if she read his mind. "That loss probably did more for Ak than it hurt him. The tale of that match will spread around the school, and the club will gain popularity. By the next meeting, there'll probably be many more members."

"Yeah, all eager to see my Voldemort card," groaned Harry. He wasn't sure how he felt. He had won, but it was because of Voldemort. Even though he was only a card... it still felt as though he had actually helped him win, which was not a good feeling.

They soon arrived right outside of Dumbledore's office, and were surprised to see Professor McGonagall standing outside.

"What are you doing here?" Ron asked her.

"I could ask you three the same," she said, looking awfully surprised. "I'm locking up the room, but why are you here?"

"We uh... had to ask Professor Dumbledore something," said Harry.

“Well, I’m sorry to say, but Dumbledore has left for the Ministry on urgent business. He is the Minister you know, and has plenty of other work.”

“When did he leave?” asked Hermione.

“Just a few minutes ago,” said Professor McGonagall. Harry could have kicked himself in the head. If he had only not stopped for the meeting, he could have given the Stone to Dumbledore.

“Well, when is he coming back?” asked Harry.

“Oh, not for several days,” she sighed. “I’m afraid he won’t be back for at least a week or two.”

“Well, thanks anyway,” sighed Harry.

“By the way,” asked Professor McGonagall happily, “what was in the package Harry?”

“Oh... that,” said Harry. He had to think of something. “Err- it was... some of Hedwig’s Owl pellets that I left at home.”

“Owl pellets?” asked Professor McGonagall, Hermione, and Ron together.

“Yeah... I have a whole collection of them...” said Harry, trying to smile.

“Well, I’m not going to pry into your personal life,” said Professor McGonagall, wincing at Harry, and walking away. “But I will tell you to return to your common room now.”

“Yes professor,” said the three of them, walking back.

“Now what are we going to do?” asked Ron.

“We’ll just have to hide the Stone from ourselves and not use it for a while,” said Harry.

“Yeah, easier said than done,” commented Hermione. “Even I’m tempted to use it! Infinite life and money.... I mean, come on!”

“Yeah, come on!” said Ron.

“I guess I’ll have to watch it then,” sighed Harry, giving the password (piez) and stepping inside. “I’ll hide it somewhere and put a trap on it so none of us, or anyone else for that matter, can touch it.”

“Fine,” said Hermione, walking to the girl’s dormitory from the empty common room. “Good night.” Harry and Ron walked up to their room, and found everyone else to have already gone to bed. Harry opened one of his drawers in the stand next to his bed, put the Stone inside it, and put a trap on it that he learned in Charms. He put the most dangerous one he knew on it, one that caused a small explosion if you touched it without saying the password first, which he designated as ‘Dumbledore’.

Harry climbed into bed, and tried to fall asleep... but the Stone was calling to him. He tried to concentrate on Neville’s breathing, but it didn’t help. The temptation to use the Stone was so much, Harry thought his brain was going to leak out of his ears.... He didn’t get much sleep that night.

Chapter 9- The Ring of The Ancients

Two weeks went by, and Dumbledore had not yet returned. The Spell Invention class was on the honor system; the students filed in and they were expected to read out of their books all period. Though Hermione and a few others did this, the rest of the class took the time to practice

playing Wizard Duel. Hermione was right: the news of Harry's magnificent victory over Ak had spread like wildfire around the school and now almost everyone was into the game.

Each day after Quidditch practice, Harry, Ron and Hermione made it a habit to head to the library, to see if they could find anything about Harry's ring, or any link it had to the Sorcerer's Stone. Even though the three of them had looked through practically every book last year to study for the O.W.L.s, they were surprised to find a few that they had never gone at before. However, each day they came no closer to finding any connection or any information at all.

It was during the trips to one of these such sessions that Harry heard a most peculiar noise coming from the bathroom.

“What was that?” he asked Ron and Hermione.

“Oh no,” said Ron. “It came from Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom.”

The noise came again. It sounding like an insane donkey yelling as it tried to swim in an acid bath... not the most pleasant thing in the world.

“Should we investigate?” asked Harry, leaning on the door to the room.

“I don’t know...” said Hermione. “Who knows what could be going on.”

“All the more reason to look,” grinned Harry, pushing the door open and walking in.

“No no!” scolded Myrtle to a group of ghosts. She pointed to her forehead. “Sing up here! In your head voice!” Her voice’s frequency went off the charts as she sang, creating that horrible noise he heard before.

“Myrtle,” said Harry, covering his ears and looking at the groups of ghosts. Each one that resided inside Hogwarts was there: Nearly Headless Nick, The Fat Friar, The Grey Lady, The Bloody Baron, and even Peeves! What was going on? “What are you doing here?”

“Just teaching these ingrates how to sing,” smiled Myrtle.

Smiled?

“Whatever for?” asked Hermione.

“To help them on their journey towards becoming spirits,” she said, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. “Singing brings out the inner life!”

“You’re all trying to become spirits?” asked Harry.

“Why else would we be caught here?” asked Peeves, floating all around the room.

“Well, you may want to learn how to sing before you teach others,” said Ron, still covering his ears from the last fortissimo of sound.

“Oh... I think I do just fine!” said Myrtle, turning back towards her small crowd of ghosts. She ‘sang’ again, and then the group tried to copy what she did. It was horrible, far worse than any torture, Harry could imagine; even worse than the Cruciatus Curse.

“Well then, we’ll be on our way,” said Harry, covering his ears again and backing up slowly towards the exit.

“Wait Harry!” cried Hermione, tugging at his shirt. “Look over there.”

Harry looked over where she was pointing and saw a small pile of books laid on top of a sink. “Maybe what we need is in there.” The three of them walked over and Harry picked up a book.

“The Afterlife: A Ghost’s Guide,” read Harry. “Hey Myrtle! What are these?”

“Those are some books I got out of the library about spirits, the afterlife and such,” she said, not looking at him. Harry returned it to the small pile, and looked at book after book, hoping to find something of interest.

Suddenly, one caught his eye. It was an old and tattered black book with no title, only a large picture on the front: and it looked just like Harry’s skull ring! He quickly opened it up to

see if there was anything inside. But, all that there was were words... and they were definitely not English. The characters looked more like odd combinations of squares, triangles, small dots and curvy lines.

“Hey!” called Hermione, seeing the book in Harry’s hands. “That’s Ptomrv, one of the ancient runes! Let me see that!” She snatched the book out of Harry’s hands and opened to the first page.

“Hey, I thought you said you dropped that class,” said Ron.

“No I didn’t,” said Hermione, looking at the first page. “I only said I dropped Divination and Muggle Studies. I never said anything about Ancient-” Suddenly, her eyes widened. “Hey! There’s a description of your ring here, Harry!”

“What does it say about it?” asked Harry, leaning over.

“It says that that it is called the Ring of the Ancients,” read Hermione, moving her fingers under the odd words. “It says the Ring shows the locations of the four ingredients of the Immortal Potion when it touches one of them.”

“Don’t you mean the Almost Immortal Potion?” asked Harry.

“No, this is a different one,” said Hermione, still reading. “According to this, the Immortal Potion would allow the drinker to become someone capable of not only living forever, but also having the power to control space and time.”

“So... basically a god?” asked Ron.

“Yes, someone who would be able to change the universe to anything they desire,” read Hermione. “It says that the Ancients concealed the four ingredients inside everyday objects to stop so many people from becoming gods. They also made the Ring they created a mandatory ingredient in the potion by changing its code.”

“Hah, so that’s why there’s so many polytheistic religions,” commented Ron.

“However,” continued Hermione, still reading. “The magnificence of the ingredients couldn’t be hidden perfectly inside the objects. All four of them made the things they were hidden in glow brightly when brought close to each other and look especially beautiful.”

“Does it say what the ingredients are hidden in?” asked Harry.

“Um... yes!” exclaimed Hermione. “The Gomotornice is hidden inside the Glove, the Havomotornice is hidden inside the Watch, the Bomotornice is hidden inside the Bracelet, the Sorcerer’s Stone was hidden inside the Necklace, and the Ring was... well, the Ring.”

“Does it say anything else?” questioned Harry, wanting to know as much as he could about this magnificent item that not more than ten minutes ago he thought was just a cool piece of jewelry.

“Well... yes,” groaned Hermione, looking like she was struggling to read some words. “But this book is so old that most of the rest is smudged out. Sorry.”

“So let me see here,” said Ron, trying to bring everything together. “Harry has a ring, that, when it touches a Legendary Ingredient brings up a map that shows the location of the other three that, when brought together, allow someone to practically become a god?”

“Uh, yes,” said Hermione.

“Wow, that seems a little... much.”

“So that Watch in Dumbledore’s drawer was really the Havomotornice,” said Harry, finally understanding. “But why would he have one?”

“Probably to hide it from Voldemort,” said Hermione, closing the book. “As long as he has even one of the ingredients, Voldemort wouldn’t be able to make the potion.”

“So why don’t we find out where the rest of the ingredients are and give them to Dumbledore too?” asked Ron. “Harry, all you have to do is touch the Stone again, we can look at the map for where the dots are and then see if we can get them.”

“We will,” said Harry, “after the Quidditch game tomorrow.”

The three of them left the bathroom, thanking Myrtle for her help. Even though she didn’t know what she had helped them with, she said, “You’re welcome,” and waved them out of the room.

“Harry!” called Ron. “Get up! Our match is starting soon!”

“Yeah yeah, I’m going,” Harry yawned back. He heard Ron sigh and close the door behind him as he left the dorm. Harry groaned again. For the first time in a while, he had gotten a good night’s rest and didn’t really feel like getting up at the moment. Knowing what the Ring was and what it could do made him feel a little better... though not too much. With this new power came a new responsibility.

Harry yawned again and decided it was now really time to get up. He tried to throw the covers off of himself, but to his surprise, he found that his arms and legs were strapped to the bed with magical rope!

“What the?” asked Harry, struggling to get out. Suddenly, the blankets were pulled off of his bed, as if by an invisible force. What was going on? If only he could reach his wand on the table next to him....

“Is you ready to go?” asked Dobby, who abruptly appeared out of thin air right next to Harry.

“Dobby! Is this your doing?”

“I is so sorry sir,” he squeaked, sounding very guilty. “But I is having to do it. It is for your own good Mr. Harry Potter.”

“What are you trying to protect me from?” demanded Harry, struggling to free himself. “What could possibly be so dangerous?”

“I cannot say,” gasped Dobby.

“But,” said Harry, stopping his struggling for a moment and deciding to play along for a while, “if you’re going to take me now anyways, why can’t you tell me?” Dobby looked at him for a second, and tilted his head to the side.

“Fine, I is able to say now,” he squealed. “Harry Potter is in danger of... the field trip!”

“The one to the pyramid?” asked Harry.

“Yes,” he squealed.

“What’s so bad about? Why was I in danger of it?”

“There is no time!” said Dobby, looking as though he were charging another one of his blue orbs that he used back at the Dursley’s. “We is having to leave now!”

“But wait!” gasped Harry, getting an idea. “I need my... owl pellet collection!” Dobby stopped charging his spell.

“Where is it?” he asked.

“Right there,” Harry said, nodding in the direction of the bottom drawer of his night stand. “Inside the drawer.” Dobby walked over to the drawer, put his hand on the knob and pulled it open, causing a fantastic explosion that blew Dobby over on his back. It was a good thing he set that trap!

Harry’s wand flew into the air, landing right next to his hand. He grabbed it, performed the counter curse on the ropes and then jumped out of bed. He quickly fixed his nightstand, that was now no more than a pile of ash, and put the trap back on the drawer containing the Stone.

After slipping his Quidditch robes on over his everyday clothes, Harry left the room, laving Dobby there. He didn't dare to wake him right now, in case he tried to take him away again. Hopefully he would just wake up on his own and leave... hopefully.

Harry ran downstairs and to the Gryffindor Quidditch room, where everyone was waiting for him.

"Where have you been?" demanded Ron.

"Dobby trouble," responded Harry with a sigh, still buttoning up the top of his robe.

Ron nodded in agreement, understanding perfectly.

"Alright team," said Harry rubbing his hands together, a few minutes before their first game of the year. Though he and Ron were veterans, the other five were looking a little scared. Even Ak was showing a few signs of nervousness. "I know you're all a little anxious about the game, but we've practiced long and hard and we're ready to go! You with me!?"

"Yeah!" they all said through their shaking voices.

"Alright! Let's go!" yelled Harry, throwing his arm into the air. He swung open the doors that lead to the field, the sun flew right into the room, and the team charged outside. The stands were filled with people, excited to see the first match of the year.

"And let's welcome the Gryffindor team now... even though they are late," came a new voice over the speaker. Lee Jordan had graduated last year and now Blaise Zabini, a Slytherin Sixth Year, was the new commentator.

"Alright Harry, get on over there and shake the captain's hand," said Madam Hooch, flying over on her broom. Harry ran over to the middle of the field, anxious to see who the Ravenclaw captain was.

"Hello Harry," she said when Harry arrived in the center of the field. Harry didn't even have to look up to see who it was.

"Hello Cho," he said, grabbing her hand. Harry had only talked to her a few times this year and she had never said anything about becoming captain. "You're the captain now?"

"Certainly am," she said, letting go and smiling. "But just because I'm your girlfriend, that doesn't mean I'll go easy on you!"

"Heh, don't expect anything less than my best against you," said Harry.

"I would certainly be disappointed if you did any less," she said, walking away.

"How about we do something later?" called Harry.

"Only if you win!" yelled Cho back.

Harry ran back to his team with a new reason to do well. The six of them mounted their brooms and got ready to go. Madam Hooch flew over with the chest of balls, opened it, and let the Bludgers and Snitch fly away.

"Teams ready?" called Zabini. "On your marks... get set... go!"

Madam Hooch let the Quaffle out of the box and let it fly right up into the air. Before Harry even blinked, Joe already had the red ball in his hand. Ron flew backwards to the goals to begin defending, and Harry started scouting for the Snitch.

This is where things all started going wrong.

All of a sudden, Harry was feeling incredibly warm, as if he were in the middle of a massive inferno. He looked down, and saw that his guess was almost dead on. It appeared as though the entire ground was no longer sand, but a giant blaze. Harry almost fell off his broom from looking at it, and tried to see how the rest of the team, and everyone in the stands, was reacting to it. To his surprise, though, no one else except for him seemed to had noticed that the entire ground was on fire!

"Hey Ron!" yelled Harry, sweating like a pig.

“Yeah?” he asked, not having much to do. The Ravenclaws were lucky if they could ever get their hands on the Quaffle, much less get it all the way to the goal.

“Don’t you see... the fire?”

“Fire?” he asked. Harry saw a massive fiery blast of ash, dust and fire go off below him that he didn’t even seem to notice. It bellowed up into the sky, creating a small, black cloud. “What fire?”

“That- you know the... that one right- oh.... Never mind,” mumbled Harry. What was going on? Why was he the only one seeing all Hell opening up right below them?

“And Gryffindor scored again!” called Zabini, trying to sound excited, even though he was a Slytherin. “Making it now thirty to zero!” Harry shook his head. He must have missed a few scores while he was trying to make sense of the fire. Now he looked over at the Ravenclaw goals and nearly fainted at what he saw. Every member of the Ravenclaw team was no longer riding a broom... but a dragon! Each beast was massive with red and black scales all over, spikes protruding every few feet, and breathing fire all over the place.

“AAAH!” yelled Harry, falling off of his broom for a second, but grabbing back on with one arm. “DRAGONS!” Harry heard screams come from the crowd as everyone turned their heads in every direction, trying to see where the dragons were.

“And Harry Potter has just made an interesting announcement, saying that there are dragons somewhere,” said Zabini. “But, there is not one in sight.”

“What are you talking about?” screamed Harry, pulling himself back onto his broom. “They’re right over there!” Harry pointed at the Ravenclaw team that was getting closer and closer every second. Wasn’t someone going to do something about it!? The dragons could destroy the entire stadium! The entire school even! “The entire team... they’re... riding them....”

“Harry,” asked Akshay, riding over to him. “Are you feeling alright?”

“Yeah, you’re seeing dragons,” said Chris.

“I’m okay,” gasped Harry, seeing them breathing fire all over the stands and his teammates, but they weren’t bursting into flames. What was going on? He had to end this match quickly... he had to find the Snitch.

And he didn’t have to look long. There, right below Harry, and near the fiery ground was the golden Snitch. He pointed his broom towards it and shot down right towards it. He put out his hand, ready to grab it... then crashed right into the fiery ground. The Snitch wasn’t really there! It had been an illusion!

Harry’s broom stuck into the sandy surface and he went flying. He did a roll in the air and landed on his back, right inside the flames. Harry started running around, putting water spells on himself, hearing laughs from the stands and comments from Zabini. But he didn’t care! He was on fire!

Suddenly, there was a sound like thunder above, and Harry looked up, hoping it was rain. It was rain... only not the kind Harry was accustomed to. This time, it was raining flaming stones. Millions of them were quickly falling from the sky, all ready to fall right on the field. It was as if there was a fiery meteor shower, and all of them were aimed right at Harry.

“AAAH! STONES!” he yelled, curling up and preparing for the impact. He could feel his body on fire, the dragons beating above, and the rocks about to land on him. Then, all of it came down at once, and an instant later, everything went black.

“Good! You is waking up!” came a voice, from not too far away. Harry felt the world slowly but surely coming back into focus and saw the all too familiar little elf standing on the bed

right in front of him. "Go away Dobby!" Harry put on his glasses, and found that he was in a bed in the hospital wing.

"Is you ready to go now?" he asked with a smile on.

"Why would I be any more ready to leave now than this morning?" asked Harry. Then, he remembered why he was in this room. Harry quickly put two and two together and figured out who was responsible for what happened. "You did all that at the Quidditch match! You made me see all those things that weren't really there! The fire, the dragons, the Snitch and the stones! You made all that!"

"I is so sorry," squeaked Dobby. "But now you is having to be ready to go, what with all the embarrassment you is must be having now."

"Dobby," said Harry seriously, "when will you understand? I am NEVER leaving! Got it?"

There was a knock at the door.

"I is having to go now!" said Dobby quickly, disappearing. The door opened and the rest of the Gryffindor Quidditch team walked up to Harry's bed. He gave a groan. They had to have lost the game; without a Seeker, how could they have possibly won?

"What happened?" asked all six of them together.

"Dobby happened," sighed Harry, lying back down on his pillow.

"What did Dobby do?" asked Ron.

"What didn't he do?" said Harry. "He made me see all these things that weren't there... making me fall and collapse."

"Oh well," said Ak. "You shouldn't feel too bad. I mean, we won anyways."

"Wha- what?" asked Harry, amazed at what he just heard. How could they possibly win without a Seeker? It was impossible... wasn't it? "How did you win?"

"I made a Snitch Slip," said Ak.

"You did a what?" asked Harry.

"A Snitch Slip," repeated Ak. "I caught the Snitch even though I was a Beater. Whenever a player catches the Snitch that's not the Seeker, it gives the opposing team one hundred and fifty points."

"So how did that let us win?"

"We got one hundred sixty points," explained Chris, "and then Ak caught the Snitch. The final score was one hundred and sixty to one hundred fifty in our favor."

"Ravenclaw didn't get any points?" gasped Harry.

"Not a one," said Mike.

"And you got one hundred and sixty?"

"Sure did," said Akshay.

Harry was amazed. His team of second years and a sixth year got one hundred and sixty points like it was nothing. Harry hoped he wasn't becoming obsolete.

"You really know the game well, Ak," commented Harry. "I didn't know anything about Snitch Slips."

"Not many people do. I think this is only the second or third time its ever been done."

"But what we all want to know," said Joe, "is what happened to you out there, Harry. What made you fall like that?" Harry was about to respond, when madam Pomfrey came over in her usual manner.

"Now's not the time for Mr. Potter to be reliving that event," she said. "Out with you all for now! Once he is released, you can ask him all the questions you want." She pushed them all

out the door. Ron quickly ran out ahead of them all and everyone else waved bye to Harry as they parted

“Ah! A mouse!” squeaked Joe, jumping into Mike’s arms.

“Oof! Get out!” yelled Mike, dropping Joe on the floor.

“What’s going on?” demanded Madam Pomfrey. “I cannot have my hospital infested with rats!”

“It couldn’t have been a mouse,” said Akshay, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose. “I didn’t see anything.”

“Well, something ran by my foot!” pouted Joe. Harry looked at him. How could a kid be so good at Quidditch and yet be so... Joe?

“Well if it wasn’t a rodent than it was probably just your imagination or something. Now, get out!” yelled Pomfrey again. The five of them quickly left the room, not wanting to summon her wrath.

“Well, who knows what it could be,” she sighed. “I’d better go get some Rodent-Catching Potion from Professor Snape just to be safe. You’ll be alright while I’m gone, won’t you Harry?”

“Yeah.”

“Alright then, I’ll be right back.”

She left the room, shut the door and walked away, leaving Harry quite alone.

“Hey Harry!” came a whisper. “I’ve got some bad news.”

“What?” called Harry, turning his head in every direction. “Dobby, get out of here!”

“No, this is Ron,” he laughed.

“Ron! So it was you who walked by Joe’s foot. Where are you?”

“I didn’t meant to do that,” laughed Ron. “But, it was funny anyways. I’m right here, against the wall.” Harry looked over to try and see him, but Ron was totally camouflaged. It was as if he was wearing an Invisibility Cloak. “Not the first time being an Animagus has helped me! Chameleons rock!”

“You’ve got that right,” said Harry, feeling awkward talking to no one. “But, what’s the bad news?”

Harry heard Ron swallow hard.

“Harry,” he said, not sounding too happy. “The Sorcerer’s Stone... its been stolen.”

Chapter 10- Neville The Death Eater

“Its been stolen!?” yelled Harry.

“Shh!” came a different voice. “You don’t want her to come out again, do you?”

“Hermione?” asked Harry. “Are you here too?”

“Yeah, I’ve been waiting here ever since you came first in,” she said. “Your Invisibility Cloak works very well.”

“Well, there’s no reason it shouldn’t,” said Harry, lowering his voice. “Anyway, how do you know it’s gone?”

"I went upstairs to change before coming down to see you," explained Ron, "and I saw the drawer you put it in. It was opened up and the Stone wasn't inside."

"How did you know I put it in the drawer?" asked Harry.

"Oh, I heard you open and close it and then put the trap on it," said Ron. "I couldn't fall asleep, you know, with immortality just two beds away."

"But who took it?" demanded Harry.

"We don't know," sighed Hermione. "Ron didn't see the culprit."

"Who could it have been?" wondered Harry, thinking hard.... Then it hit him! Who else had been awake when he had put the Stone away? Neville! His breathing that night was not like a sleeping person's... much louder than usual. Why didn't he notice it before?

"Neville took it!" gasped Harry.

"Neville?"

"Yes," said Harry, jumping out of his bed, feeling perfectly fine all over. "And who knows what he could be doing with it."

"Probably giving it to Voldemort," said Hermione and Ron together, still invisible.

"My thought exactly," said Harry, pulling his bandages off. Underneath them, the skin was perfectly healed. "And we have to stop him as soon as possible."

"Right," they said, finally becoming visible again. Hermione lowered the hood of the cloak and Ron changed back into his human form.

"Let's go check if we can find someone who's seen him recently," said Ron.

The three of them snuck out of the Hospital Wing, trying to leave before Madam Pomfrey's returned. Once they escaped that room, the three of them burst into a full sprint all the way back to the Gryffindor Common Room, and then to Ron and Harry's dormitory.

"Harry! Ron! Hermione?" exclaimed Seamus and Dean together who were sitting on the floor, playing Wizard Duel. "You can't come in here Hermione!"

"Are you okay?" asked Dean. "You look like you're out of breath!"

"Have you seen Neville?" gasped Harry, ignoring their questions.

"Yeah, he just left a little while ago," said Seamus, still looking at Hermione, and wondering what was going on, and appearing to be a little confused. "He looked like he was in a big hurry."

"So it was him," said Ron.

"What did he do?" asked Dean. "Is Neville in trouble?"

"Did he say where he was going?" asked Ron, still ignoring their questions.

"No," said Seamus, shaking his head.

"Then we'd better hurry up and start looking for him," said Harry. The three of them turned around and ran out of the room.

"Wait! What's wrong with Neville!?" they heard Dean yell from behind.

"What do we do now?" asked Hermione.

"We need to find out where Neville is," said Ron.

"Well duh. But how do we do that?" asked Hermione again.

"We need to find an Ingredient to the Immortal Potion," said Harry. "I can touch it with the Ring and then the map will come up. We can just look for the green dot, and that's where Neville is."

"But how can we do that?" asked Ron as they left the Common Room. "Remember? The Sorcerer's Stone is gone."

"We need another ingredient," said Harry. "And I know where to find it. It's in Dumbledore's office! He has the Legendary Watch there." They ran faster than they ever did in

their entire lives to Dumbledore's Office, the entire world unknowingly counting on them to get the Ingredient back as soon as possible. It didn't take them very long to arrive, the three of them had been there more times than most professors.

"Monkey cakes," gasped Harry, out of breath when they reached the gargoyle. It moved aside, and they tiptoed up the stairs, trying to catch their breath as they went. When they arrived up in the office, Harry walked over to the desk, to the same drawer he had gone to before. He opened it up... and there was nothing inside!

"Where is it?" asked Ron, looking over.

"That's what I'd like to know," said Harry, feeling a little worried. He opened the drawer above it... nothing there. He opened the one on the other side, and the one below that, but there was no Watch in sight.

"Check over there," said Harry forcefully, pointing to a shelf of books. "It has to be around here somewhere and we're going to find it!"

Within ten minutes, Dumbledore's office was torn apart. Papers, books, pens, ink bottles and more was all over the floor, but there was still no Watch in sight. Every shelf, drawer and surface was cleared and searched thoroughly, but nothing was found. Harry felt a little guilty for tearing the place apart like this, but it was for the good of the universe. After only a few more minutes of tireless searching, the three of them magically fixed the room, with the only witnesses to their crimes being Fawkes and the pictures of the previous headmasters on the wall who were mostly all asleep.

"I can't believe we didn't find it," said Harry to himself. "Voldemort is probably making Elixirs of Life already! I can't believe we didn't find it!" Harry banged his fist down hard on the desk, nearly breaking it in half.

"Harry!" called Hermione, putting her hand over his. "Calm down. It'll be—"

Suddenly, both of them were distracted by the same thing. Harry's Ring shone a bright yellow, as did Hermione's bracelet. Harry's finger burned for a second and the map appeared before them again, just as it did when he touched the Sorcerer's Stone.

"Hermione..." said Harry slowly. "Your bracelet is... an Ingredient!"

"Ron?" she gasped. "Did you know that?" Ron's eyes were wide and glued to the magnificent Bracelet.

"No," he said, not looking away. As much as Harry would have liked to continue this little interrogation, there were much more pressing matters currently at hand. He looked over at the map... the green dot was in England, that much was for sure. But where was it exactly?

"There has to be a way to zoom in," said Harry, looking for some sort of button on his Ring. He shrugged and touched the right, red eye on the skull. To his surprise, the map zoomed in on the green dot, making it fill the entire screen, and the zoomed-in map was revealed. According to the chart, the green dot was in a massive forest, and it was moving all around.

"Harry!" yelled Ron. "That's the Forbidden Forest!"

"How do you know?" asked Hermione.

"Because Hogwarts is right there!" he said, pointing to the lower right corner of the map. Indeed, there was a big castle there, complete with a Quidditch field, lake, and railroad tracks coming out of it. What other place could it be?

"Okay, so he's in the Forbidden Forest," said Harry, realizing that he was still holding onto Hermione's hand. He quickly let go, and the map disappeared. "Let's go find him!" Not knowing how much time they had left, they quickly left the office, doing a quick last minute check that everything was in its place.

"Well at least he's still on the grounds, and not with Voldemort yet," said Harry.

“Yeah...” said Hermione, sounding as if something was on her mind. “Ron? If you knew the Bracelet was a Legendary Ingredient, would you still have given it to me?”

“Err- um... sure,” he said. “Of course I would have... maybe.”

They reached the front doors of Hogwarts and opened them up, revealing the massive Hogwarts grounds. They ran towards the forest and got ready to go in... as they did almost every year.

“I think we should start a petition to change the name ‘Forbidden’ Forest, to just Regular ‘Forest’,” said Hermione, catching her breath before they went in. “We go in it every year... but why? Why do all the bad guys have to go in there?”

“Dunno... the rhinoceros told them to?” suggested Ron.

“Yeah, that must be it,” said Harry. “Ready to go?”

“Yeah,” sighed Ron and Hermione together, stepping inside with Harry. It was like a completely different world inside the Forbidden Forest. Unlike the nice, clear, and quiet Hogwarts grounds, the forest was filled with bushes, trees and other plants that seemed as though they would eat you if you stepped on them. Animals, and probably other things Harry didn’t want to think about, were constantly making noise, some okay and nice, others not nearly as much.

“How are we going to find Neville if we keep walking in random directions like this?” asked Hermione, pushing a large tentacle-like plant that was hanging off a tree out of her way.

“Enh, we usually find whatever we’re looking for this way,” said Ron, pushing the same thing out of his way.

“Well, we may need a bit more than luck to help us this time,” said Harry. “We have to find Neville fast, and chance may not be quick enough. Hermione! Give me your bracelet.” She took it off her arm, and handed it to Harry, lighting up the forest with its intense light upon touching the Ring. Harry slipped it on his arm, and his Ring lit up. It hurt a little, indicating that they were close to another Ingredient, but not too close. “I’ll just follow the pain in my finger. The more there is, the closer we are.”

Harry stuck his hand out in front of him, as if his finger were the guide. He followed the burning sensation in his Ring as if her were someone following the beeps on a metal detector.

“I think we’re getting close,” said Harry, the pain growing so much that his finger was beginning to shake involuntarily. “We’re getting real close now! Only a few- whoa!”

Suddenly, Harry felt as though he had just entered Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes again. He did a somersault in the air and his feet floated up in the sky, as if held by a large and invisible person.

“Ron! Hermione! Help!” yelled Harry, stuck upside down in midair.

“You know Harry,” said Ron. “We would, if we’re weren’t having the same problem as you!” Harry turned his head around (the rest of his body felt frozen all over) and saw that it was true. The two of them were stuck just like he was, upside down and a few feet above the ground.

“Hey,” said Ron, sounding cheerful. “We’re in the Forbidden Forest, upside down and frozen, hungry and cold, and surrounded by millions of demons of every size and shape that probably wouldn’t think twice about ripping the skin off of our bones, and then slurping it up like spaghetti. Well, look on the bright side. At least it couldn’t get any worse.”

“Wrong!” yelled Neville, suddenly jumping out of a nearby bush, taking them all by surprise. The Sorcerer’s Stone was nowhere in sight.

“NEVILLE!” yelled Harry, Ron and Hermione together. “Give back the Stone!” Neville laughed hard, throwing his head back.

“I don’t really think you’re in any position to tell me what to do,” he said, pushing Harry on the nose with a single finger. He swung back and forth in midair as if his feet were on hinges to the sky.

“What are you doing here anyway, Neville,” demanded Harry, finally coming to a stop. “How did you get the Stone? Shouldn’t you be with Voldemort right now, giving it to him?”

Neville stifled a laugh.

“Harry,” he said, “you are the worst trap-maker in the world. I was awake that night, and heard you say the password. All I had to do was wait for the right moment.... As for being with my master now, there are things more powerful than the Sorcerer’s Stone. That is what my master desires.”

“He didn’t tell you what it was he wanted?” asked Harry, wanting to kick himself for being so stupid and not realizing Neville was still awake that night he set the trap. He was happy, though, that they at least knew something Neville didn’t... the Immortal Potion. He may have known that Voldemort wanted something more powerful than the Stone, but he didn’t know what it was.

“That is unnecessary information,” he said. “All he told me to do was to set a trap here for you three. He said that you would somehow follow me here by using a ring that could sense the Stone.”

“He knows about the Ring!” whispered Ron angrily to Harry. How could he have known that? Harry didn’t even know what it was until just a few days ago! Why was Voldemort always a step ahead of them?

“So what’s going to happen now?” asked Harry, trying to stall for some time. “Is he going to come here and take us away to his palace of darkness or what?”

“I don’t know,” said Neville, checking his watch. “My master did not give me further instructions beyond what I have already done. He just told me to wait.”

“How can you respect a master like that?” asked Harry, still trying to figure a way out of the trap. But his whole body, except for his face, was entirely numb and then frozen solid. There was no way out. “I mean, he doesn’t even tell you what he’s planning on doing. How can you possibly be with him?”

Neville walked up to Harry’s face, looking more serious than he had ever seen him.

“Harry,” he hissed softly. “Voldemort has done more for me than your Dumbledore has ever or will ever do. Dumbledore could have performed the same spells Voldemort did on me to make me how I am now, but he didn’t. He let me fail, knowing that he could have helped.”

“The spells that Voldemort used on you were probably Dark Magic,” said Harry. “Even if it would save someone’s life, Dumbledore would never condone the use of it. So your little reason of being a bit more superior is not good enough, Neville. Just because Voldemort gave you a bigger brain, head of hair and arms doesn’t mean you should switch your allegiance as if it were a bathroom light.”

Neville walked so close to Harry that their noses were practically touching.

“Eventually,” he spoke softly, “Voldemort will win. He will rule the world that he has will ablaze as an eternal king, and no one will be able to stop him, especially you, Mr. Potter. All that matters now is whether or not, when that time comes, are you going to be on his good side?”

“Wouldn’t it be better to die than to live a good life in a Hell?” asked Harry. “Because that’s just what the world would be if Voldemort ruled it.”

“For some... I suppose,” said Neville, backing up. “I, however, am not among that group... fortunately.”

There was a moment of an awkward silence.

“So what’s this spell you have us under here Neville?” asked Harry, still looking desperately in vain for a way out. “I’ve never seen a more secure spell than this.”

“This is one of my master’s new inventions,” he said, kicking some dirt into the air. “Beautiful... isn’t it?”

“What exactly does it do?”

“Well,” said Neville, checking his watch again, “I suppose we have a little while. This is the Flipped and Frozen Trap Spell. You set it to grab a specific person when they come close to its proximity. Then, when the person walks close, it sucks them in, flips them upside down, and turns the muscles and bones in the body below their head into jelly, for lack of a better word. But, the best part about the spell is that the person who set the traps can control the people who stepped into them.”

Neville smiled and took out his wand. He pointed it at Harry and Harry followed the wand perfectly. Neville put his wand up, Harry went up and hit the trees. He threw it down, and Harry’s head banged on the ground. It was ten times as painful, not being able to cover where he was hit with his hands. Harry yelled out. Neville happily continued moving him through the air as if he were some sort of toy.

But, just like any other child with his toys, Neville quickly got bored with moving Harry all over the place, and fixed him back where he was. Even though Harry’s head was spinning, his little talk with Neville had given him an idea.

“So Neville,” gasped Harry, still feeling a little queasy. “These traps can only be set for a single person. What does it do? Detect their DNA or something?”

“Yeah, that’s it,” said Neville, sounding a little annoyed that he had to wait so long.

“But what if the person in the trap were to change his DNA?” asked Harry, smiling. Ron and Hermione nodded too, they had caught on.

“I suppose the trap would let them go, but that’s imp- oh no...”

Neville realized what Harry, Ron and Hermione were going to do a second too late. Harry transformed into a Gryffin instantly and jumped out right onto Neville, knocking him to the ground. When he heard Ron and Hermione fall to the ground in their animal forms, Harry decided to show Neville never to try and get them again. He extended his claws out of his paw so they were almost three inches long. He brought it up, right above Neville’s head, saw the look of fear and panic in his eyes, and then brought the claw down, right on his face, leaving three massive, bloody gashes.

But, that one slash wasn’t enough to take down Neville. He let out a scream, and Harry ripped across his face again with his other paw, making another bloody mark. That last blow subdued Neville and he collapsed to the ground, almost unconscious. At least it hurt enough not to scream. Harry turned back into a human, still looming over Neville.

“Where is the Stone!” yelled Harry, shaking Neville’s shoulders.

“I’ll never tell,” said Neville, drooling blood all over the ground, his eyes rolling back into his head. Harry pushed him to the ground, finally knocking him out. He stood up, brushed himself off, and looked at Ron and Hermione. They transformed back too, and walked over around Neville as well.

“Look at him,” said Hermione, shaking her head.

“Pathetic,” spat Ron.

“All it took was little surprise, and he was taken down,” said Hermione. “All of Voldemort’s followers must share his faults.”

“But how are we going to find the Stone now?” asked Ron, waving his arm at the bloody Neville. “The only person who knew where it was is currently... unavailable.”

“Well, we can just use my-” said Harry, before the most surprising thing he could have ever imagined happened. Right before them, Neville Longbottom burst into flames.

Chapter 11- The Dueling Club Incident

It happened so quickly, Harry could barely see what was going on. He thought the flames started at his head and worked their way down to his feet, but it was so fast, it was impossible to tell. All that Harry knew for sure is that where Neville was a second ago, there was now only a pile of ash.

“Where did he go!?” yelled Ron.

“Did he... die?” asked Hermione.

“Well, that would be the best thing to happen all day,” mumbled Ron.

“Oh come on Ron!” said Hermione angrily. “Even if he was evil, he didn’t deserve to die. There was still hope for him.”

“Don’t worry Hermione,” said Harry. “I don’t think he’s dead.”

“What makes you think that?” demanded Ron.

“Remember last year, when we spent the night in Hagrid’s cabin after capturing Wormtail?” questioned Harry.

“Yeah,” said Ron, “and then in the morning, he was gone.”

“And all we could find of him was a pile of ash,” said Harry. “I think the same thing that just happened to Neville is what happened to Wormtail.”

“But what did just happen?” asked Ron.

“That’s the question of the day,” said Harry. “Any ideas Hermione?”

“Well,” she said thoughtfully, “I’m not sure exactly what this spell was, but I’ve seen ones like it before. I remember reading about one where someone was frozen in an ice cube suddenly, and then it broke into a million pieces. Everyone thought he was dead, but it turned out that was just the way for his master to summon his minions. Maybe this fire version is just Voldemort’s way of doing it.”

“That’s the best theory so far,” said Harry. “But we have to find the Stone before we can do anything else.”

“How are we going to find it, though?” asked Ron.

“Hermione, give me your Bracelet again,” said Harry. She threw it over to him, and Harry caught it in his hand.

“Nice catch,” she grinned. Harry slipped the Bracelet on. It, along with the Ring immediately glowed a bright yellow, and just a few feet in front of them, a small, green light appeared on the ground. It was very dim, compared to the Ring and Bracelet’s glow, but there nonetheless.

The three of them walked over to the shining spot and immediately began digging with their hands, clawing at the dirt. Each time they dug further down to it, the glow became more bright and vibrant. It wasn’t too long before the Stone was revealed, brighter than the sun. Harry slipped it into his pocket and decided it was time to go. After Ron stepped into his trap again and Harry and Hermione had a good laugh, they headed back to the castle.

“Alright,” said Harry, when they finally left the forest. “This time, I’m going to put an even more powerful trap on a different drawer and I’ll make sure that-”

“Harry!” interjected Hermione. “I think we need to make the Stone more secure than that. Neville easily took it last time and I don’t think we can risk another situation like that ever happening again.”

“You’re right,” admitted Harry. “But where else can we put it?”

“It’s not about putting it somewhere more secure, it’s about giving it to someone who will make it more secure.”

“But Dumbledore’s not here, remember?” said Ron.

“Oh for god’s sake Ron!” yelled Hermione. “How stupid can you be? Do you think Dumbledore is the only one who is qualified to protect a Stone? Remember in our first year, all the teachers made something to guard it? So all of them are able to watch it.”

“Fine, but who do we give it to?” asked Harry.

“Yeah, I don’t want to give it to Snape,” said Ron.

“Well, we could give it to Professor McGonagall,” suggested Hermione. “She is practically second in command at the school anyway.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” yawned Harry. “Let’s give the Stone to her and go to bed. Having the weight of the world on your shoulders is very tiring.”

The three of them walked back to the castle, still talking about what had just happened. Not before long, they reached Professor McGonagall’s office, ready to tell her the news and give her the Stone.

“Professor?” asked Harry quietly when they walked into her office.

“Yes Mr. Potter?” she asked, furiously working on grading a paper. “Aren’t you supposed to be in bed by now?”

“Well yes, but I, that is... we, have something for you.”

She looked up from her work and raised an eyebrow.

“You have something for me?” she asked.

“Well... kind of,” said Harry, moving his head from side to side. He didn’t want her to think this was a present or anything.

“Kind of?” she asked, looking even more curious. “What is it?”

Harry decided to just be out with it and give it to her. He reached into his pocket, with his non-ring hand, grabbed the Stone, and presented it to her. As soon as her eyes met it, they grew twice their size and her jaw fell to her desk.

“That’s a... a....” she gasped.

“It’s a Sorcerer’s Stone,” said Harry, setting it down on the top of her desk. She didn’t take her eyes off of it.

“Where did you... get this?” she asked quietly.

“It was in the package you gave me from Dudley,” said Harry. “He got it from Perenelle Flamel. He didn’t know what it was, so he sent it to me.”

“Perenelle Flamel?” she said. “How did you get it from her.”

“We were the only ones that showed up for her funeral. In her will, it said to give the Stone to whoever bothered to come. I guess we were the only ones that did.”

There was a moment of silence.

“Why are you giving it to me?” asked Professor McGonagall, back in her normal tone of voice

“To protect it better than I did,” sighed Harry. “It’s already been stolen once, and I don’t want it to be stolen again.”

“Who took it?”

“Neville,” spat Harry.

Professor McGonagall sighed.

"That poor boy," she said, shaking her head. Then, returning her gaze to Harry, "you did the right thing bringing it to me. I will protect it, you need not worry."

"Thank you professor," bowed Harry.

"No trouble," she said, turning her attention back to the Stone. "No trouble at all."

Harry, Ron, and Hermione left the room, feeling much better.

"Good," said Ron. "Now we don't have to worry about it anymore."

"And we won't be tempted to use it either," said Harry.

"Harry!" came a voice suddenly from ahead. "Where have you been?"

"Oh, hello Cho," said Harry, trying to sound happy, despite what happened.

"Where have you been all day?" she demanded, crossing her arms. "I've been in the Hospital Wing most of the day waiting for you! I didn't know where else to go!"

"I'm sorry Cho," apologized Harry, signaling to Ron and Hermione that they could leave. "I just had some... urgent business."

She crossed her arms.

"Well, I suppose I can forgive you," she smiled. "But from now on, tell me before you come out of unconsciousness."

"I will certainly try," grinned Harry back.

"Well, I want to see you more often than what we've been doing now," she continued. "After all, this is our last year together." This comment hit Harry hard. He hadn't realized it up until now, but since Cho was a year ahead of him, she would graduate next year and poor little Harry would be left all alone.

"How about after the dueling club meeting tomorrow?" suggested Harry.

"No," said Cho. "I have a meeting after that."

"Okay then, how about after... um, the Wizard Duel meeting?"

"Oh, you're into all that?" she asked, scrunching her face.

"Enh, it's okay," said Harry, trying to downplay his obsession and try to have the same opinion as her.

"But... sure, that'll work," she replied. "I'll see you then!"

"See you!" yelled Harry, walking away from her. Had she really been looking for him all day? Harry hoped Cho wasn't becoming a stalker... though that wouldn't be so bad, she was only stalking him after all.

Harry returned to the Gryffindor Common Room, in which there were still a few people awake, mostly the Dueling Club members. Everyone was excited about the upcoming meeting since it would be their first duel this year. The rest of the people, Harry saw, were there practicing for the approaching Wizard Duel club engagement. It was certainly going to be a good week.

After working his way through the mass of people, Harry arrived at his dormitory. Seamus and Dean were downstairs, along with Ak. Ron, however, was busy looking under beds and in closets.

"What are you doing?" asked Harry.

"Looking for Neville," he said, closing the last closet.

"Any sign of him?" asked Harry sarcastically, putting his night clothes on.

"Not a thing," said Ron, shaking his head, taking Harry seriously.

"Good night Ron," said Harry, jumping into his bed. "You keep an eye out for Neville, alright?" Harry closed his eyes, not hearing Ron's answer, and thinking about where Neville was right now and what Voldemort was doing to him.

“So what are we going to do at this meeting?” asked Malfoy to Harry before the Dueling Club meeting the next day. The entire club was waiting outside of the Great Hall, anticipating the fight. To make up for many of the members that left, there were even more newcomers. All of Harry’s Quidditch team had joined, along with Ak’s friends and several of the new first years came as well, trying to learn spells that would help them in class.

“I actually don’t know,” said Harry, feeling a little guilty. He should have consulted with Professor Flitwick, the head of the club, about what to do for their first meeting. He was captain of the club after all. But, with everything that had been going on, Harry totally forgot about it, and was now just hoping Professor Flitwick had a good idea. “Probably it will be just like what our previous meetings have been like.”

Just then, the doors opened by themselves and everyone filed excitedly into the room. The first thing Harry noticed was the fact that, for the first time ever, the entire room was completely empty. There were no tables, no chairs, no nothing. Just a massive, empty room.

“Come in! Come in!” called Professor Flitwick. He was hovering around the room, about ten feet off the ground, sitting cross-legged. Of course, the most obvious and noticeable thing about him was his enormous smile that seemed to give off its own rainbow of color and trail behind him as he went about. He floated around everyone as they walked in, shut the doors when they all were inside, and then began speaking again.

“This meeting shall be a little different than our past ones,” he announced with his magnified voice. “Up to now, we have been working on only one on one to three on three fights. While the knowledge of how to fair well during these situations if necessary, it is not all that you need to know. What would you do if you were engaged in a war or another type of large battle? You would not seek out and destroy every person individually... no. You need to learn how to take advantage of your surroundings, how to attack on the larger scale, and how to make use of guerrilla tactics.”

He took his wand out, and held it into the air, looking like he was getting ready to bring it down and cast a large spell.

“I need all of you to spread out as much as you can, at least ten feet between each of you. Trust me, you will need it.” He waited for a minute while everyone moved around, spinning their arms to make sure they were far away enough from each other. When Professor Flitwick was happy with everyone’s locations, he continued talking.

“When I bring my wand down, your battle location will form. I will wait a minute for it to completely develop and then I will countdown for you to begin. The last person standing is the winner, and don’t worry: I will announce when there is only one left. It may be hard to tell....” Harry saw that everyone was looking nervous, but he was thinking this was going to be one of the best meeting ever.

Professor Flitwick brought his wand down in one magnificent motion. Hundreds of green swirls erupted from the tip and flew all over the room, growing as they went. Then, when each swirl hit a surface, a gigantic tree grew right out. So many of these trees were discharged from the walls and floor, Harry wasn’t sure whether he was still in the Great Hall, or a rainforest. The trees were huge, at least five feet thick, and they went all the way up to the ceiling. Bushes grew all around them, some with thorns, others just leaves and Harry could’ve sworn he heard a bird call somewhere.... They were going to fight here?

“On your marks!” boomed Professor Flitwick’s voice, even though Harry couldn’t see him anymore. “Get set! Go!”

Harry waited for something to happen... but heard nothing. There were no sounds of spells being used or people yelling; just a few crunches of leaves every now and then, showing

that there were people moving, but not easily seen. Harry crept forward, not knowing if he was going to bump into someone, bump into a tree, or continue going straight. He was just beginning to notice that it was incredibly dark in here.

Suddenly, right in front of him, Harry heard a human voice. He ran over towards the side of a bush and ducked behind a tree. He put his head out to the side, to see if he could see what was going on. Though it was still very dark, he could make out two figures, fighting.

“Take this!” yelled one of them. Harry thought it sounded like Mike. “Kitte Imasu!”

Harry heard something sharp and fast fly through the air quickly and hit its target. It sounded like a bow shooting an extremely aerodynamic and sharp arrow.

“Arg!” yelled Mike’s victim. It sounded like one of the new Gryffindor first years: Chad. Harry heard him fall to the ground.

“Never underestimate the power of Japanese... and their spells,” snickered Mike, spinning his wand around and blowing off the tip, just like an outlaw would do with his gun. This was Harry’s chance. One of them was gone, and Mike was distracted. He grabbed his wand, spun around, and met him face to face.

“Stupefy!” yelled Harry, just as Mike saw him. He tried to move out of the way, but it was too late. The spell hit him right in the chest and he fell down, right next to Chad. Just to mock him blindly a little bit, Harry spun his wand around and blew on the end, before putting it back in his pocket.

“Two down, twenty more to go,” he said to himself.

Harry crept forward, keeping a look out for anyone he knew to be wary of. As he went along, he found several people on the ground, knocked out just like Mike and Chad had been. Harry was thankful that Ak, Tci, and Aylar were among those on the ground. They were the best duelers there besides himself. But then, he thought to himself, who beat them? Harry tried to suppress that thought and continued on, stepping over Akshay’s face that had a pair of broken glasses on it.

“Help!” came a voice from up ahead. Harry knew who it was: Hermione. Immediately, he forgot all about the duel, and ran forwards, not stopping to hide behind any trees. If Hermione was calling for help, it had to be serious.

“Help!” she called again. This time, Harry could see the situation. Chris was on her back, with his arms around her neck, trying to bring her down while Joe was busy attempting to remove her Bracelet from her arm.

Harry didn’t take any time to think about what was going on.

“Apoyiosi!” he yelled, aiming right at Joe. There was an explosion right below his feet and he was thrown up into the trees. Now, it was Chris’ turn. “Wingardium Leviosa!” Harry brought Chris up high, right to the tops of the trees and then brought him down, much faster, so he slammed right into the ground, face first and unconscious.

“Are you alright?” asked Harry, running over to Hermione.

“Yeah,” she gasped.

“What was that all about?”

“I don’t know,” she said, catching her breath. “First, Joe jumped out of nowhere and grabbed my Bracelet. I shook him off, but when Chris came down right on my back, it got to be too much.”

“What did they want with your bracelet?” asked Harry. “You don’t think they’re... Death Eaters?”

“Ekthkweeze meh!” yelled Joe from the branch of a tree. His robe had gotten caught in a branch on his way up, and now he was hanging from it. “Can you help meh down please?”

“What did you want with the Bracelet?” demanded Harry.

“What bracelet!?” asked Joe, waving his arms frantically.

“Don’t play stupid with me!” yelled Hermione. “You just attacked me!”

“What? No meh didn’t!” yelled Joe. “All meh know is first meh was fighting Chris, and then meh was up here in this tree.”

“You mean you don’t know what the Bracelet is?” asked Harry.

“I don’t even know what bracelet you’re talking about!” yelled Joe, spinning around and waving even more. There was a snapping sound heard in the branch he was hooked on and it suddenly fell all the way down to the ground with a loud crash.

“Were you under some sort of spell or something?” asked Harry, helping him up.

“Meh guess so,” said Joe, brushing himself off. “But, now that you mention it, meh do remember a little. Blurs mostly... meh remember not feeling mehself. Yeah, meh was attacking Hermione! But, meh don’t remember wanting to do it, it was like there was someone else, telling meh what to do.”

“So, like someone was controlling you?” asked Harry again.

“Yeah, meh guess so,” said Joe, shrugging his shoulders.

“Someone must have put the Imperius Curse on him,” whispered Hermione.

“That means someone here wants to Bracelet,” responded Harry. “But who here even knows what it is, much less want it?”

Just then, there was a sudden flash of red light, and Joe collapsed to the ground. Harry ran over to the nearest tree and hid behind it. He saw Hermione do the same. Someone was attacking them.

“Come out come out wherever you are,” came an all to familiar voice. Neville slowly crept out from the dark trees and Harry thought he saw some snakes slither by as he came out. He was twirling his wand in his hand, as if he had just accomplished something great. “I know you’re here Harry, so come out and face me.” He was walking closer and closer to Harry. But, he was going to wait for just the right moment to appear and-

“Oh no you don’t!” yelled Hermione, jumping out from behind her tree. She quickly pointed her wand at Neville, just as he was turning around. “Stupefy!”

“Fucillius!” yelled Neville, at just the same instant. The two spells met in midair, but Neville’s immediately overpowered Hermione’s, causing her to fall over backwards from the impact of an imaginary speeding bullet.

“Take this!” yelled Harry, taking full advantage of the fact that Neville was distracted from watching her fall. “Itamuda!” A spinning, black beam ejected itself from Harry’s wand. It went right for Neville, and hit him... then passed right through him.

“What!?” yelled Harry, seeing Neville turn to face him. Was he a ghost? What was going on? Just then, Neville began flickering and going all staticy, as if he were a projection, and then all out disappeared.

“Accio wand!” came a voice from behind Harry. He turned around just in time to see Neville summoning his wand right out of Harry’s hand. He quickly shoved the wand into his pocket, and grinned at Harry.

“Now whatcha going to do?” he asked, sticking his tongue our between clenched teeth. Harry was worried... he was powerless. He had to transform and hope that would take Neville by surprise again... but would that work? Would Neville fall for the same trick twice?

Suddenly, out of nowhere, Malfoy fell from the trees and pounced right on top of Neville, wiping the grin right off of his face. He subdued him on the ground, holding his arms down with his hands, and putting his knees on Neville’s legs.

“Thanks a million Malfoy,” gasped Harry, relieved.

“No problem,” said Malfoy, sounding like he was straining to keep Neville pinned down. “What are friends for? But, could you hurry up and take this guy out? He’s stronger than he looks... and he looks pretty strong.”

Harry ran over to Neville’s pocket, and took out his wand. He pointed it at Neville’s face, and looked at the terror in his eyes. What spell should he use on him?

“Bona nox!” yelled Harry so loud that some birds flew away in the trees above him. Black, lightning-like beams shot out of the tip of his wand, electrifying Neville’s forehead, making it shake all over and pulsate, but only for a second. Then, the effect of the spell finally came.

“I’m blind!” yelled Neville. “Blind!”

Malfoy grabbed the wand out of Neville’s flailing hand and got up off of him, wiping some sweat from his head.

“How long were you up there waiting?” Harry asked Malfoy.

“I’ve been there since the beginning of the match,” he said, watching Neville run around aimlessly and crash into some trees. “I’ve been sniping out people all over, taking them out quite easily. It was just by luck that you happened to need me right here.”

“Well thanks,” said Harry, looking over at Neville, and not seeing any of the boy he was as a first year anywhere on or in him. Harry ran over to him, and grabbed his neck, pinning him up against a tree.

“Was it you who tried to take Hermione’s bracelet?” demanded Harry.

“Wha- no!” gasped Neville, gripping his neck, and looking all over in vain for a way out. He was at Harry’s mercy.

“Of course it was you!” yelled Harry, tightening his grip. “Who else here is slimy enough to try and pull a trick like that!?”

“I don’t know who is was,” choked Neville. “But it wasn’t me!”

“What’s going on here?” asked Malfoy, walking over.

“He tried to steal Hermione’s Bracelet,” said Harry through gritted teeth. “Or, at least control someone else so they would do it.”

“What would he want it for?” asked Malfoy. “I mean, sure, it looks nice, but is it worth stealing?” Harry looked at him... he didn’t know that the Bracelet was actually one of the Ingredients in the Immortality Potion. Should he tell him?

“I don’t know,” Harry finally lied. “And were not going to find out now! STUPEFY!” Harry aimed the beam right at Neville’s chest, and saw it instantly knock him out. He let go of his neck and let his unconscious body drop to the grass-covered floor.

“When did Neville get here anyway?” Harry asked Malfoy. “I didn’t see him come in at the beginning of the match.”

“I did,” said Malfoy. “From my spot in the trees. He came in a little after it began. It gave him a bit of an advantage, really, since he came in after everyone else had been fighting for a while. I saw him take out everyone in his path... Tci, Ak, and Aylar especially.... He certainly has become a better fighter, that’s for sure.”

“Yes, well, do the ends justify the means?” asked Harry. “Sure, Neville’s a better warrior, but at the cost of him being a Death Eater.” Harry thought this would be a good time to see just how much Malfoy knew. “Speaking of which, I haven’t heard about much Dark Activity going on lately... any idea what that’s about?”

“Yeah,” sighed Malfoy. “You-Know-Who hasn’t said too much about it, but he’s planning something big... I mean, really big.”

Harry swallowed hard. Should he have headed Dobby more?

“Well,” sighed Malfoy, breaking the awkward silence between the two of them. “Yet again, it has come down to us.”

“Too bad we had to go and become friends,” said Harry, backing away a little.

“Yeah, too bad that I’m going to have to beat you,” grinned Malfoy.

“Oh yeah, what makes you so sure of that?”

Malfoy raised an eyebrow.

“My new Polymagus form,” he snickered. “Prepare to be obliterated.”

Harry backed up against a tree and took out his wand, ready to deal with whatever it was Malfoy was going to become. Malfoy closed his eyes and threw his arms and legs out as far as they could go, spreading his fingers apart from each other and Harry assumed he was doing the same to his toes as well. Then, when he was as stretched out as far as Harry thought he could be without splitting apart, Malfoy just... fell over, right onto his back.

“Are you okay?” laughed Harry.

“This is just the beginning,” said Malfoy in Harry’s head through Animagus telepathy. He began moving his fingers and feet in the most particular manner, so that his entire body was spinning around on the ground. Slowly at first, then faster and faster, until his animal powers began to kick in and he was almost a blur. Malfoy was spinning so fast, he was starting to dig himself into the ground, like some sort of human drill. Then, when he was about five feet under, the animal form appeared.

It looked like a massive worm more than anything. It was thick enough to fill the entire hole, but very short, only coming about four feet out of the hole. It was a dark yellow all over, and looked extremely slimy. It had only a single eye, with a small spike protruding underneath it. Suddenly, many much smaller versions of the beast popped up all around it, forming some sort of grotesque outline of the monster. All of the creatures then started spinning, very slowly, but fast enough to make the ground shake.

Cracks began to appear in the ground around the creature, which spread out further and further. Then, the smaller versions of the monster began moving around the large one, as if they were trying to create some sort of whirlpool, which was not too far from the truth. The beasts were moving so fast that the monster had turned into some sort of living black hole, sucking in the land around it. Entire trees, bushes, the floor and mounds of dirt were sucked into the moving pool of monsters and then devoured by them, just as quickly, by a series of horrible pokings from the protruding needles beneath their eyes.

“What kind of animal is that?” yelled Harry, holding onto a tree that was beginning to be sucked into the monster.

“It’s a Surmanger!” yelled Malfoy back, telepathically. “It’s a rare desert beast that creates black hole-like ground all around it, sucking in everything. The smaller ones eat the things it sucks in, and the larger ones soften the ground, so it is easier to bring in and devour. It’s like some sort of horribly well oiled machine!”

“You’ve got that right!” said Harry, jumping off of the tree that he was previously hanging onto. It was sucked right into the belly of the monster, and eaten almost instantly. It was amazing, to see the smaller creatures peck at their victims so fast that it looked as though it was being disintegrated rather than eaten.

The Surmanger had now eaten most of the magical forest, and Harry could see some of the Great Hall’s tiled floor appearing beneath the grass that was being sucked up, though not for very long since it was brought in just as quickly. Professor Flitwick had now revealed himself. He was flying around the room, moving unconscious kids high into the air so that they wouldn’t

be sucked in and eaten. Harry decided to follow that line of thinking, and transformed his back into wings. He took to the air, away from the ground that was being quickly devoured.

“Stupefy!” yelled Harry, aiming right for the monster. The red beam shot right at it, but then, right before it was about to hit, the beast ate the ray of light as if it were a bush. “That thing can eat light!”

“Matter, energy, it all tastes the same,” telepathized Malfoy the monster. Now, all of the forest had been consumed, and he was working on the actual Great Hall, sucking in the floor, ceiling and walls. Harry had to really struggle to stay in the air and not be eaten. He had to distract Malfoy somehow, to try and buy some time to think of something.

“Hey Malfoy!” yelled Harry in his mind. “How come you’re only one animal now? I thought you Polymagi could combine your animal’s DNA to create a super powerful monster.”

“We can,” said Malfoy back, not appearing to have slowed down in his rate of consummation. “But this creature is powerful enough on its own; it doesn’t need any other parts to make it better. Just by itself, it is invincible.”

Suddenly, one wall broke out of its connection with the others and flew over towards to monster, revealing the outside world, and some of the Hogwarts grounds. Flitwick had to do some quick moving to have the floating students dodge the flying wall. A second later, that entire wall was eaten, and the next three were on their way out. Harry didn’t see how he was going to win this one.

Harry did a few air tricks, just to try and put off the inevitable a little bit longer. All the walls of the room were gone, along with the floor. Malfoy was now working on eating the magically free-floating ceiling, which would be gone within seconds. Once that was finally devoured, Harry found himself outside on the grounds. Malfoy had eaten the entire Great Hall, and he showed no sign of slowing.

“Alright Harry,” snickered Malfoy. “I think I’ve done enough damage. It’s time to end this duel!” Abruptly, the moving smaller versions of the monster stopped in their tracks. Each of them appeared to be standing upright, like a soldier, with their spikes in the air. Then, they started furiously shaking the tips of their heads from side to side, and their spikes... fell off!

“What are you doing?” asked Harry.

“Underneath those spikes are powerful vacuum-like holes,” explained Malfoy. “It’s time to suck you up Harry!” Indeed, where the spikes used to be, there was now a small black hole on each of the smaller monsters. They all began moving in their circular pattern again, only this time, it was not the earth being sucked in, it was the air.

Harry instantly felt the new force pulling on him, and it was incredible. It was as if he were being lassoed from all directions, and each one was being pulled by a sumo wrestler. He could feel the air being sucked in all around him, along with a few clouds above him. It was becoming hard to breathe. It didn’t take Harry very long to succumb to the beast.

Harry couldn’t take it anymore. Even in just the few seconds he had been struggling against Malfoy’s new version of his monster, he felt as though he had run several marathons. He just... couldn’t fly any more, and he stopped flapping his wings. Instantly, he began being sucked into the beast, faster and faster, until he was just about to be devoured....

“Draco Malfoy is the winner!” announced Professor Flitwick, quickly moving Harry out of danger. He used his wand to move him high up in the sky, along with the rest of the kids, out of the monster’s reach. “Please, Mr. Malfoy, you may transform back now!”

“Yes professor,” Harry heard Malfoy say. The Surmanger began spinning all over, so fast that it was starting to shrink. Once it was about the size of a person, it slowed down and Malfoy was revealed, back in his normal form, his arms and legs spread out on the ground.

“Superb transformation,” commented professor Flitwick. “But, next time, would you please not destroy the entire room?”

“I shall certainly try professor,” smiled Malfoy, though he looked as though he were in pain. His hands were on his stomach, and he was looking a little pale. Harry wondered if all or even some of what he ate was retained in his human stomach.

“Good job Malfoy,” said Harry, offering him his hand just as a cool end-of-summer breeze blew by. He took it and they shook. “You are a worthy opponent, that’s for sure.”

“I don’t believe I’ve ever seen a better show of sportsmanship in my entire life than what I just saw now,” came a voice. Harry looked over and saw Dumbledore walking over to them.

“Professor!” exclaimed Harry. “What are you doing here?”

“I never miss a Dueling Club meeting,” he said. “I just came down to watch the last part of the match. It seems as though I was the only person who thought to do that.”

“Everyone else was too afraid of getting eaten to come down,” grinned Harry.

“When did you get back from the Ministry?” asked Malfoy, looking a little better.

“As a matter of fact, I just got here. This duel is the first part of Hogwarts I have seen all day. Though, I see this part has been destroyed.” He surveyed the area quickly, with a frown on his face. “We’re going to have to rebuild this entire room... and quickly too!”

“Professor,” whispered Harry. “There’s something I have to tell you.”

“Whatever it is, I’m sure it can wait, Harry. There is much to do.”

“I’m not sure if this can, professor.”

“Well then,” sighed Dumbledore, “tell me quick. There is much to be rebuilt, and many children to be revived.”

“During the match,” began Harry, making sure that Malfoy was out of hearing range. He was over helping Professor Flitwick enervate the unconscious kids. “During the match, I think someone used the Imperius Curse on some of the second years.”

To this, Dumbledore rose an eyebrow.

“What makes you think that?” he asked curiously.

“Well, at one point during the duel, Chris and Joe attacked Hermione. They were trying to steal her bracelet. But, when I asked them about it afterwards, they said they didn’t really remember doing it but did have a sensation of not being in control of themselves. Either they were very convincing, or it really happened. I think the latter is true in this situation.”

“What would they want her Bracelet for?” asked Dumbledore slowly. Harry didn’t know what to say. Should he tell him that he knew about the Immortal Potion, and all about the Sorcerer’s Stone and the Ring of the Ancients that he had?

“I have no idea,” lied Harry, playing it safe. He didn’t know what information he was supposed to know and what he shouldn’t know. He’d just play dumb and safe for a while....

“Well, it is very easy to find out whether an illegal spell was used or not. All we need to do is take a trip down to the Ministry, and go to our suspect’s files. In there are all the spells they’ve ever used. If someone has the Imperius Curse recorded inside, they are the culprit.”

“Well, I don’t think you’ll have to search for very long,” said Harry. “Neville did it. I’m sure of it.”

“What makes you so sure?” questioned Dumbledore, crossing his arms.

“Well, for one, he is a Death Eater. He attacked me before, and he is Voldemort’s personal slave. I think that’s about all the evidence anyone would need. Why are you letting him stay at Hogwarts anyway? He’s a Death Eater! You should toss him away!”

“Yes, I know that that would be the most logical course of action,” sighed Dumbledore. “But, Neville, deep down, is a good kid. I’m sure that if we give him enough time and support, we can win him back.”

“If you think so, professor,” said Harry, not sharing his belief at this time.

“Harry!” yelled Hermione, running over to him. “I just got up! You didn’t win!”

“I’ll leave you two now,” smiled Dumbledore, patting him on the shoulder, and walking off to Professor Flitwick who still looked in a state of perfect happiness over the excitement of the match.

“Yeah, Draco beat me this time,” sighed Harry.

“Draco?” asked Hermione, scrunching her face a little. “That’s the first time you’ve ever called him that.”

“Yeah, well, first time for everything,” grinned Harry, walking off, for the first time in his life, actually feeling happy that he had lost.

Chapter 12- Too Many Voldemorts

It took the entire next week, and a few days into October to finally rebuild the Great Hall. The house elves were working overtime, and they could not be happier. Every day Harry walked by, he saw at least a hundred of them, bucket in one hand, some sort of magical tool in the other, and a smile on their face. Sharing their enthusiasm was Malfoy. Everywhere, all that people talked about was his mighty victory over Harry. Some knew the two of them were friends now, some didn’t. It didn’t matter to them, no one stopped praising Malfoy for his magnificent transformation and wishing that they had seen it.

However, once the week got closer to Friday, the school-wide talk turned from the Dueling Club to the Wizard Duel Card Game Club. From what Harry had been hearing, there would be many more people attending this week’s meeting than the handful that came to the last one. Despite all the hype, it wasn’t really the meeting that Harry was looking forward to, but the meeting afterwards, with Cho.

“Come on Harry!” called Ron, about an hour before the club would meet. “I want to get down there early, so we can have some time to practice.”

“Alright, alright,” said Harry, rolling off of his bed, and onto the floor. He put his book down, and walked over to Ron, who was busy adding a few final touches to his deck. They walked down to the common room together, where both of them met a very angry looking Hermione.

“Where do you think you’re going, Harry?” she demanded, her arms crossed and a single foot stomping.

“Um, to the Wizard Duel Club Meeting,” said Harry, as if it were very obvious.

“Not this time,” she said seriously.

“What do you mean?” asked Ron.

“You’re not skipping this Prefect’s Meeting!” barked Hermione. “It’s the first one of the year, and it’s a very important one.”

Harry groaned.

“Oh come on Hermione,” he sighed. “Not today....”

“Harry,” she said, “with privileges come responsibilities. This is one of your responsibilities. You have to attend these meetings, so come on.”

“But I’ll miss the Wizard Duel meeting!”

"If you hurry up I'm sure you'll have time for both," said Hermione quickly, checking her watch. "But come on, we have to hurry now! Let's go!"

"Fine," sighed Harry, allowing Hermione to drag him out of the room. "See you later Ron! Don't wait up for me...."

"Don't worry, I won't," grinned Ron as they stepped out of the room. "Have fun!"

"So what exactly do we do at these meetings?" asked Harry as they started walking.

"You never did read your manual, did you?" asked Hermione, shaking her head. Seeing Harry do the same, she continued. "Well, I'll never know how you got to be a Prefect. I mean, sure you're grades are okay and all but..."

"Can you just tell me about the meetings?"

"Well, we do lots of stuff really," she explained. "We talk about things to change around the school to make it better, give the opinions of our house classmates on issues, nominate new prefects for next year, and more. It's really quite fun!"

"I'm sure," said Harry, rolling his eyes, just as they were passing the newly made Great Hall.

"Wow, the house elves really did a great job on it," smiled Hermione with her arms on her sides. She stopped for a minute to just look around. "And to think, they did all this... with pay!"

"Yeah, that's great Hermione," said Harry, not sharing her enthusiasm for equal elf rights. "But don't we have to go to the meeting?"

"Look at how beautiful they made the ceiling!" gasped Hermione, not paying attention to Harry. "And the walls, and the floor! Oh my! Just look at how well they did it, I can't believe they were paid to do this! Oh and look at..."

"Hermione!" yelled Harry, bringing her out of her catatonic state. "You dragged me away from the Wizard Duel meeting, and after that, we had better go now."

"Alright," said Hermione, taking one last look and then walking back.

She lead the rest of the way, still making a comment every now and then about house elves and such. By the time they reached the room, Harry was really wishing he was with Ron at the club meeting.

"Be sure to put your prefect badge on," said Hermione, fixing hers so that it was perfectly straight. "If you walk through the door without one on, you'll be blown backwards fifty feet."

"Wow," said Harry, taking his out of his pocket and attaching it to his robe, resisting the urge just to try out the trap anyways. He didn't really like wearing all the time like Hermione did. Though he liked the honor of being a Prefect, Harry wasn't sure he enjoyed all the power he had over the other students, especially those others who were worthy of his position.

Once Hermione was satisfied with how Harry's badge looked, she opened the door and revealed the inside. To Harry's surprise, it wasn't elaborate at all. There were no posters, banners, fountains or anything in the room. All the was were several school desk chairs set out before two slightly larger chairs, with the words 'Head Boy' engraved onto one, and 'Head Girl' engraved onto the other. As soon as the two of them entered, all twenty heads turned towards them.

"Ah, I'm happy to see that Harry Potter has finally decided to join us," said the Head Boy, Joe Bob. He gave a weak smile, and waved his arm in the direction of the chairs.

"Time to sit down, Harry," said Hermione, nudging him in the side. The two of them took the only two chairs left.

“Now that we are all here,” said the Head Girl, Dora, “and since it is the first meeting of the year, I think we should all introduce ourselves, so that we can refer to each other by name and not just by house and year. So, let us begin with a roll call.”

“I will call out your grade, then house, then name,” continued Joe Bob. “When you are called, simply say: ‘Here,’ I don’t want any ‘presents’ or other such nonsense, got it? Alright. Let us begin with,” he opened up a small scroll that was on the floor next to his chair, “Fifth Year Prefect for Gryffindor House, Aniruddha Gollapalli.”

“Here,” said a tall, Indian boy whom Harry thought he had seen before in the common room.

“Fifth Year Prefect for Gryffindor House, Megan Williams.”

“Here.”

“Fifth Year Prefect for Ravenclaw House, Zac Peeples.”

“Here.”

“Fifth Year Prefect for Ravenclaw House, Holly Smith.”

“Here”

“Fifth Year Prefect for Hufflepuff House, Andrew Arena.”

“Here.”

“Fifth Year Prefect for Hufflepuff House, Andrea Anera.”

“Here.”

“Fifth Year Prefect for Slytherin House, Geoff Halliday.”

“Here.”

“Fifth Year Prefect for Slytherin House, Kush Raj.”

“Here.”

“Sixth Year Prefect for Gryffindor House, Harry Potter.”

“Here,” said Harry quickly, slouching in his chair. This roll call was taking forever.

“Sixth Year Prefect for Gryffindor House, Hermione Granger.”

“Here,” said Hermione loudly and proudly.

“Sixth Year Prefect for Ravenclaw House, Paulo Calvacanti.”

“Here.”

“Sixth Year Prefect for Ravenclaw House, Lisa Turpin.”

“Here.”

“Sixth Year Prefect for Hufflepuff House, Ernie Macmillan.”

“Here.”

“Sixth Year Prefect for Hufflepuff House, Hannah Abbot.”

“Here.”

“Sixth Year Prefect for Slytherin House, Draco Malfoy.”

“Here,” said Malfoy, about as enthusiastically as Harry. For a fraction of a second, Harry wished he were in Slytherin, so he could sit there next to Malfoy and have a good time, instead of sitting here next to uptight Hermione.

“Sixth Year Prefect for Slytherin House, Pansy Parkinson.”

“Here.”

“Seventh Year Prefect, and Head Boy, for Gryffindor House, Joe Bob BobJoe.... Here!” said the Head Boy, chuckling to himself. Harry rolled his eyes.

“Seventh Year Prefect for Gryffindor House, Casey Wilson.”

“Here.”

“Seventh Year Prefect for Ravenclaw House, Felix Malinkevich.”

“Here.”

“Seventh Year Prefect for Ravenclaw House, Montana Sweet.”

“Here.”

“Seventh Year Prefect for Hufflepuff House, Shane Joyce.”

“Here.”

“Seventh Year Prefect for Hufflepuff House, Tricia McMillan.”

“Here.”

“Seventh Year Prefect for Slytherin House, Max Kashdan.”

“Here.”

“Seventh Year Prefect, and Head Girl, for Slytherin House, Dora TheExplorer.”

“Here,” said the girl next to him.

“Excellent,” said Joe Bob, putting the scroll away. “Everyone is here.”

“Now, down to business,” said Dora. “We have much to discuss....”

“Ah yes, we have hundreds of topics,” added Joe Bob, hitting the armrest of this chair with his hand and staring blankly at the crowd of students. Then, after waiting a second or two, he gave a small cough that echoed throughout the room. “So... does anyone have anything to talk about, because I sure as heck don’t.”

The Sixth Year Ravenclaw Prefect, Paulo, raised his hand.

“Yes!” said Joe Bob, pointing at him. “What is it?”

Paulo stood up.

“I was just wondering,” he said quite loudly, “how does this school intend to deal with the letters from You-Know-Who, sent to us just a matter of weeks ago? Is the body of professors planning some sort of show of aggression to their senders, or are we going to take the passive side of the imbroglio and merely allow time to nurse this wound?”

“Well, that is a very god question, Paulo,” said Joe Bob, clearing his throat. “There are many things that are planned for the letters, most of which have happened already. Watch and you shall see.”

He reached into his pocket, and took out his letter from Voldemort. Harry was shocked to see that he still had it, and even more so that it appeared as though it had been opened.

“You can make it into an elephant!” He threw the letter out in front of him so that it hovered in the air, and shot a magical beam at it. The letter instantly turned into a two dimensional version of an elephant, and gave a roar. There was some scattered laughing.

“Or even an owl,” he said, magicking the letter again, and turning the elephant into an origami version of an owl. It gave a hoot and flew around rather awkwardly. “Look! A letter that carries letters!” There was a bit more laughter this time.

“And don’t underestimate the letter’s power as a mode of transportation,” continued Joe Bob, hitting the owl with yet another beam, and making it into a spaceship which he jumped into and flew about the room in. “Yeehaw!” This time, everyone except Harry laughed. He just didn’t see how Joe Bob could take such a serious situation like this and twist it into some sort of comedic act.

“And last but not least,” said Joe Bob, jumping out of the paper ship and into his chair “the letter’s natural power as fire fuel.” He conjured a hovering fire, and made the ship fly right into it, causing a small but impressive show of fireworks to appear. To this, everyone except Harry stood up and cheered.

“So as you can see, Paulo,” concluded Joe Bob, making the fire disappear and putting the ashes from the letter into a small trashcan by making a magical dustpan appear. “There are many things to do with the letter, though I most highly recommend the last one.”

“Why didn’t you stand up, Harry?” asked Hermione when everyone sat down.

“I don’t know,” said Harry, staring at Joe Bob. “There’s just something about him that strikes me as... odd.”

“How so?” asked Hermione.

“Like how he still has his letter, and how he made what should have been a very serious question’s answer into a funny show.”

“Oh Harry,” said Hermione, “you really have to lighten up. I mean, most of the kids kept their letters just for show, and comedy is a god way to escape fear. I think what Joe Bob did was commendable almost.”

“Whatever,” said Harry, turning his attention back to the Head Boy and Girl. They were answering another question that someone else had asked and Harry had missed. Then, just when Harry was beginning to understand what the question was, he saw the trashcan that Joe Bob had put the ashes of the letter in glow a faint blue. The ashes slowly then rose out of the bin, and went under Joe Bob’s chair where they materialized back into the letter. Harry rubbed his eyes and shook his head, just to be sure that what he just saw happen had actually occurred. He looked around furiously, to see if anyone else had notice, but they were all nodding and commenting on the current topic. Harry looked at Joe Bob, and saw a small smile on his face... he had brought his letter back.

[“Is there a problem, Harry?” asked Joe Bob, turning to look at him. “You were looking around the room like a madman... is everything alright?”

“Well...” said Harry, his minds racing. Should he say he saw him bring back his letter? “No... everything’s fine.”

“That was certainly a fun and interesting meeting,” said Hermione as everyone was standing up and getting ready to leave.

“Yeah, sure,” said Harry, not really paying attention to her. He checked his watch. Good; if he hurried, he could still make it in time for the Wizard Duel club meeting. “I’ve got to go, Hermione. See you later!”

“Fine, go have fun at your little kiddy game club,” called Hermione after him.

“Oh, you know you had fun cheering me on at the last meeting, Hermione,” Harry yelled back at her.

“Err... well, see you later Harry!”

Harry ran towards the room where the club would meet. As he got closer, he removed his Prefect Badge, and put it down into the dark depths of his pocket. He didn’t want anyone there thinking they had to go easy on him because if they beat him in a match he’d take away points from their house. Shortly after, Harry arrived at the room where Ak and Ron were in the middle of a match to show everyone how the game was played.

“-and now I attack with my last Bewitched Tea Cup!” said Ron. They were using the holographic table for the demonstration, and Harry saw Ron’s cup spill some hot tea onto Ak’s deck. “And since my five teacups have a power of five each, you have to discard the top twenty-five cards of your deck! Take that Ak!”

“A good move,” said Ak as Harry sat down. He was amazed to see that there were at least seventy people in the room this time. The space was almost entirely filled, and Harry had to work his way through the crowd for a front row seat. “But not good enough.”

“What do you mean?” asked Ron. “I have twenty cards in my deck and five fighters out in play. You, on the other hand, have four cards in your deck with no fighters out. Next turn, when my cups attack again, you’re dead! There’s no way you can win.”

“Ha, you shall see,” said Ak, allowing the table to give him his card. “For my first action, I shall play the Increase Time Spell which gives me an additional action during my turn. I now have a total of three actions to use instead of two.

“And now, I shall play... Voldemort!” Ak threw the card out onto the field, and when it materialized, there were a few shrieks of terror and surprise, though not too many. After all, most of the people here came from hearing about Harry’s victory over Ak, and knew from that that Voldemort was a card. “And you should know his special ability, Ron. When he comes into play, all of your cards are discarded.”

“No!” yelled Ron, seeing his five teacups shatter and explode. A nice little effect.

“Now you have nothing to defend you from his power,” grinned Ak.

“Nice try,” said Ron. “It’s not like he can even attack this turn! You just played him, and you can only attack at the beginning of your turn.”

“I already knew that,” said Ak. “And to fix that problem, I will play, the Quick-Attack Spell!” Ak placed the spell onto Voldemort, and little winged shoes appeared on his feet. “Now I can attack you.”

“Once last thing, Ak,” said Ron. “I have twenty cards, and Vold- er, You-Know-Who only has a power of ten. I won’t lose this turn.”

“Ron you fool,” yelled Ak, looking a little annoyed. “I’ve had this all planned out. I know that little thing, and to resolve it, I will play Unholy Strength Curse. It doubles one of my fighter’s power for a single turn. Now he has sufficient power.”

“So I...”

“Lose!” yelled Ak, having his Voldemort attack Ron and making his deck vanish. All the holographic cards on the table disappeared and the decks were released from their holders. “Good game Ron.”

“Yeah, I didn’t expect to win against you anyways,” sighed Ron, taking his deck out of the slot, not really sounding as though he truly believed in what he just said.

“Now!” said Ak to the rest of the people there. “Now that you all know how to play, it is time for the club tournament to begin! It will be a single elimination tournament, each of you will face one other, and the winner will go on.”

“Like how the Dueling Club used to do it!” piped a little voice from somewhere in the crowd. Harry thought is sounded like Joe.

“Yes, but not exactly,” said Ak. “You see, if I put all of your names into a hat, and read them all out, it would take far too long and this meeting wouldn’t be over until next week. So, to make all of our lives easier, I and the rest of my fellow heads of the club have already put all of your names up on this chart.” He waved his hand in the direction of a wall of the room. On it was a massive chart that had everyone’s name in individual boxes at the bottom. Connecting every consecutive two boxes was a single line, and another line went up that was perpendicular to that one. Connected to that line was another box which began the whole process over again, connecting every two consecutive boxes, until it went all the way up to the top to a single box where the winner’s name would be put. It was like a pyramid going up, made out of lines and boxes.

“You will fight the person in the box that is connected to yours,” continued Ak. “Whoever wins will have their name magically put in the box above your two, and the process will begin again until there is only one champion. Those who lose are free to roam the playing area and watch. The holographic table will only be used for the final match. Are you ready to begin?”

“Yeah!” yelled the crowd excitedly.

Ak smiled.

“Excellent. Just go over to the wall, check the chart, and see who you have to face. Good luck to you all!”

Harry, along with everyone else in the room, ran over to the massive chart and checked who his first opponent was. It was some kid who he had never heard of, and would therefore be hard to find. Luckily, the kid found him first. Sometimes, it came in handy to be popular.

“Are you, Harry Potter?” he asked. The kid was around three feet tall, and his head was about twice as large as his incredibly skinny body. It looked as though one good wind would knock him over and cause him to break.

“Uh, yeah. That’s me.”

The kid stuck out his tongue in quite an odd way, and scrunched his eyes closed and made some sort of squeaking noise which seemed to come out from his spine rather than his mouth.

“Great! Let’s play!” he squealed.

It was an incredibly easy game. The kid took forever to get a fighter out into play, and when he finally did manage to put send out a house elf, Harry already had ten other fighters ready to go, and the kid had around five cards left in his deck. The house elf was quickly made history, and the kid’s deck count was zero.

“Good game!” screeched the kid as he gathered up all his cards and mashed them together into one giant pile.

“Yeah... sure,” said Harry, walking away slowly, back to the chart on the wall to see who his next match would be against. He saw that it would be against someone he knew, Seamus for a change, and he looked around the mass of people for him. After searching for a second, he saw that Seamus was readily engaged in a match that looked like a win for him. To kill some time, Harry decided to talk to Ak about some new strategies. He looked around for him, and saw, like himself, that he had beaten his opponent already and was just waiting around for his next victim to finish his current game.

“Hey Ak!” called Harry, stepping over a few kids to make his way to him.

“What’s up Harry? You beat your opponent already too?”

“Yeah, he was pretty easy.”

There was a few second of silence as they both surveyed the playing field.

“I can’t believe how many people came here,” said Ak, biting his bottom lip and nodding his head. “Sixty-four in all. The perfect number for a tournament.”

“I saw you in the practice game earlier,” said Harry, trying to find out some things about Ak’s strategy, just in case it came down to the two of them again. “It looks like you’ve changed your strategy quite a bit. No more Cloning Chambers or Flobberworms.”

“Yeah, I’ve completely changed my deck around,” sighed Ak, rocking back and forth, his cape billowing. “I found my weaknesses from playing against you last time and decided to change my tactics. Now, instead of playing with Flobberworms, I just use Voldemort.”

“What’s so great about that card?” asked Harry. “I mean, it’s good and rare, but to base a whole deck around it....”

“Oh,” grinned Ak, “you shall see Harry... you shall see.”

“Hey Harry!” called Seamus. “We’ve got to play now!”

“Alright,” said Harry, turning around, and feeling a little disappointed that he didn’t find out more about Ak’s deck. “I’m coming.”

Compared to his last match, this one was downright difficult. Harry had to actually think before he played some cards, though not very hard. Seamus was just a slightly better version of the kid Harry played last time, they both had about the same quality cards. A few hard ones here and there, but nothing Harry couldn't deal with by playing a few Killing Curses or Stupefies. It was over pretty quickly.

"Good game," said Harry as his phoenix delivered the last blow to Seamus' deck.

"Yeah yeah," he growled back, looking down at the ground and gathering up his scattered cards. Harry shrugged, stood up, and walked over to the chart which already showed that he was the winner of the last match.

"Three more to go," said Harry to himself as he looked at the chart and saw that he was in the quarterfinals. According to the table, his next opponent was some other kid, Susej Tsirch. "Weird name." He looked around for a weird looking kid to match the name, but saw no one.

"Are you Harry Potter?" whispered a kid behind Harry. He turned around, and saw another student that looked almost exactly like his first opponent. But this one was a little bit taller, a ghostly pale all over, shivering slightly, and appeared to be on the verge of tears. He was also holding a small box which Harry assumed contained his cards.

"Yeah," said Harry, eyeing him suspiciously, and trying not to speak too loud. It seemed as though even if he talked too much the kid would explode into a million pieces. "Are you okay?" To this comment, the kid dropped his box of cards, and they spilled all over. He scrunched his eyes up and made his hands into fists.

"Why... does... everyone... ask... me... if... I'm... okay?" he whispered. He began shaking furiously all over, and Harry wondered if he was going to go into a spasm. Just when Harry was about to call for help, the kid threw his hands into the air and ran out of the room, screaming and running over everyone's heads.

"Wow," said Harry as everyone returned to their games after that little moment of insanity. "These new kids are really weird." He turned back to the chart, and saw that it had declared him the winner. Harry's name moved up into the next box and showed his next opponent.

"Aylar," hissed Harry. "That little cheater and card counterfeiter is going to pay." Harry scanned the room for any sign of where he was, and caught sight of him off in a corner. Harry stepped over a few people and cards to make his way over to him, just in time for the match's end.

"Another ten points of damage to you," smiled Aylar, finishing off his opponent. Now, Harry saw that he had put the money he made from selling cards to use. He had rings all up and down all of his fingers that shone all the colors of the rainbow. His robe was made of a thin and silvery cloth that looked finer than silk, but harder than steel as it made a clanking noise when it touched the floor. His hair was done up in a very interesting fashion: it was highlighted gold all over, and he had his bangs come down to cover one eye. He looked more like he was the evil mastermind of a horrible company than a second year student.

"You ready to play, Aylar?" asked Harry, still scanning him.

"It depends, are you ready to be my next victim, Harry?" smiled Aylar, moving his hand in a circular motion and having all the cards float up to it. He pushed his old opponent aside magically and beckoned Harry to sit.

"Nice rings," said Harry, sitting down and shuffling his deck.

"I couldn't say the same for-" said Aylar, before he actually looked at Harry's. He stopped shuffling his cards, and became entranced with Harry's rings. He didn't move at all, he didn't even blink.

“What?” asked Harry after Aylar’s staring was beginning to creep him out.

“Wha- oh! Nothing...” said Aylar, shaking his head and coming back to reality. Did he know what Harry’s Ring was? “But where on Earth... where did you get that ring?”

“You mean this clear one?” asked Harry, setting his deck down.

“No no!” hissed Aylar, waving his arm. “The other one... the skull one.”

“Oh, I... uh... picked it up in a shop,” said Harry, drawing his opening hand and trying to enjoy the moment in which he had something Aylar wanted and could not have, no matter how many cards he counterfeited.

“What shop did you-”

“Can we just get on with the game,” interrupted Harry. “This is match is in the semifinals after all.”

“Yeah, alright,” said Aylar, setting his deck down, and summoning his opening cards to his hand telekinetically. “Let’s get started.”

“And you can go first.”

“No, you go first.”

“No, you.”

“No, you.”

“No, you!”

“No, you!”

“No, YOU!”

“Fine!” said Aylar, putting his hands up into the air. “I’ll go first.... That will make you lose faster.” He laughed and made the top card of his deck float to his hand. “And for my first action,” Harry noticed that there was a group of people gathering around them, “I will play... heh, how about this? Harry Potter!” Aylar threw his card onto the playing field, and indeed it was a Harry Potter card.

“I’m a card!?” gasped Harry. “Let me see that!” He picked the card up off of the ground, and read it over. “Well, at least I’m a pretty good card... though this one is a counterfeit version.” He slapped the card back onto the ground, and squinted at Aylar. He merely shrugged.

“Enh,” said Aylar. “Most of my cards are fake but... so are most of the kid’s here.” He straightened his card out, placed it back on the ground, and returned to examining his hand. “And for my next action, I will play a Merfolk.” He set the card down, and Harry wished they were playing on the holographic table so he could see himself interact with Aylar’s other cards. “Your turn.”

“I know,” said Harry, drawing his card, and looking at his hand. An Electo Poli spell, a Stupefy, another Stupefy, a phoenix, a house elf, and a Hippogriff. Not too bad, not great either though. “I’m going to play a phoenix for my first action, and for my second, I will Stupefy myself!” Harry put the cards out.

“What do you mean, Stupefy yourself?” asked Aylar, playing with his rings.

“I mean I’m going to Stupefy your Harry Potter card,” said Harry, throwing the Stupefy spell card onto him. “And he can’t attack me next turn and kill my phoenix.”

“Nice move,” said Aylar, beginning his turn. “You’ve played the best of all my opponents so far... not that that’s saying much.” He looked around the crowd around them and glared at his previous opponents who all hid their faces. “Anyway, I will of course not attack your phoenix with my Merfolk since its power is much higher. But, I will, for my first action, play Call of the Ocean.”

“What’s that do?” asked Harry.

“It’s pretty nice, actually,” smirked Aylar. “I discard one Merfolk in play to search my deck for five other Merfolk and put them into play.” He tapped the one he had in play with his finger and it flew over to Aylar’s discard pile. Once he did that, he made his deck glow bright, and five new Merfolk cards shot out from inside and into play. Harry noticed that each one had an ‘A’ in the bottom left hand corner. “Now, I will play Grablulk, The Legendary Merchieftan. He doubles all of my Merfolk’s power, but it comes at a slight drawback. Every time one of my Merfolk go to my discard pile, I have to discard cards equal to its power.”

“Sounds pretty bad,” said Harry, beginning his turn.

“Not really, it usually helps more than it hurts. Especially when I get lots of Merfolk into play.”

“Whatever,” said Harry, drawing his card. It was another Electo Poli. He was beginning to feel a little nervous; he wasn’t getting anything really good that could help him. “I’m going to Stupefy your Harry Potter again,” Harry felt so awkward saying that, “and then I’m going to play my Hippogriff.” He put the cards down, and ended his turn, not in a much better situation now than he was at the beginning.

“Alright then,” said Aylar, grinning. “Prepare to be destroyed, Harry. For my first action, I’m going to play Song of the Seas, which doubles the amount of Merfolk I have in play, and if I have a Grablulk in play, it quadruples my number. So, I now have twenty four Merfolk in play, even though the copied Grablulk don’t retain their special abilities.” Aylar slammed the card down on the table, and twenty four blank cards magically appeared. Harry raised an eyebrow upon seeing them appear. “That’s a little bit of my own magic. It makes it easier to remember how many I have.”

“Great,” said Harry, feeling like he did at the last match when he was facing thousands of Flobberworms. Where was Voldemort when he needed him?

“And then,” continued Aylar, “I am going to play Aqua Nero. It deals damage, divided however I like it, to your fighters, based on my fighters’ total power, if they are Merfolk. Since their total power is forty, I will deal twenty to your Hippogriff, and twenty to your phoenix, killing them both.” He put the card down, and Harry discarded his two fighters. Things were definitely not going well. “Your turn Harry.”

“Great,” he sighed, drawing his card. If he didn’t get a fighter, he was in trouble. He needed something to block the damage that was going to come to him from the Merfolk. Harry breathed a small sigh of relief when he saw that he got another house elf... a very small sigh of relief. He played it quickly and then drew another card, with the hopes of getting Voldemort, but he instead got another Electo Poli. Harry ended his turn in a very bad position.

“I expected better from you Harry,” sighed Aylar as he drew his card. “I really did... but, oh well. First off, I’ll attack your house elf with all of my fighters, killing it, leaving you fighterless. Then, I’m going to play the Ocean card. It transforms the playing field into a massive sea, and increases all of my Merfolk’s power by one. Lastly, I will draw a card, and ask you to give up Harry.”

“Why should I?” he asked, feeling as though he should, but not really wanting to.

“Because,” whispered Aylar, leaning in, “if you don’t, you will receive a very bad defeat that could embarrass you.”

“More so than giving up?” asked Harry. “I don’t think so... besides, I can still win.”

“Whatever,” said Aylar, leaning back.

Harry started his deck. He had to get something good... he had to! But, the only thing that could help him in this situation was Voldemort. As much as he hated even saying it, he

needed that card! Harry closed his eyes, and reached for the top card. He drew it, turned it around, and opened his eyes.

“Another Electo Poli,” sighed Harry, putting it into his hand. “I really have to get rid of a few of those.” Next turn, he was dead. He had no fighters left to block the damage, and it would all go to his deck. Unless he could destroy all of Aylar’s Merfolk this turn, he was doomed. But, there was no way to do that-

Suddenly, Harry took a closer look at the four Electo Polis in his hand. He noticed, that in addition to dealing two damage to a fighter or a player’s deck, it had another special ability.

“If the battlefield is currently water,” read Harry off the card, “then Electo Poli deals two damage to all of your opponent’s fighters instead of just one.” Harry thought about this for a second. “Aylar, the Ocean car makes the battlefield water, right?”

“Yeah,” he said, tapping his fingers on the floor and looking very impatient.

“Of course!” said Harry to himself. “Water conducts electricity! Thank you Electo Poli!”

Harry took one out of his hand, and set it down into play. “For my first action, I will play Electo Poli! And since the battlefield is water, it deals two damage to all of your cards, Aylar! That means all of your little Merfolk with a power of two are gone!”

He raised an eyebrow.

“So, you killed my Merfolk,” said Aylar, discarding them.

“Aren’t you forgetting something?” questioned Harry.

“What?” asked Aylar is if he knew what it was.

“Your Grablulk’s ability, it makes it so that if I kill a Merfolk, your deck takes damage equal to its power. So you take... eighty damage.”

“So!?” yelled Aylar, discarding eighty cards from his deck. “That’s still not enough to defeat me, I have a hundred card deck!”

“Yes,” grinned Harry, “but... I’m going to play another Electo Poli which kills your Grablulks too! Now, Aylar, you are defeated!”

Aylar just stared at Harry for a second, as if in a state of disbelief.

“You...beat... me?” he gasped, looking at Harry still, then turning to his cards.

“Yep,” said Harry. “I guess that shows... cheaters never win.”

“But I-”

“Try getting some real cards, Aylar,” spat Harry, gathering up his deck, and walking away quickly from that horrible cheater, back to the chart to see who he would face in the final match, though he didn’t have much doubt about who it was going to be.

“Ak,” said Harry to himself, seeing that that was whom he was going to fight. He turned around and saw that the group of students that were watching his and Aylar’s match were now migrating over to the last few seconds of Ak’s. Apparently, the chart was so confident in Ak’s victory, it had already paired him up with Harry for the final.

Harry pushed his way through a few kids and got to the front of the pack. There, he saw who Ak’s victim was.

“-and you take... twenty damage, Ron,” smiled Ak, finishing Ron off. “And since you have only ten cards left in your deck, I win.”

The crowd surrounding the match burst into applause, it must have been a very good match. Harry wished he could have seen it. Ron and Ak shook hands, and they both gathered up their cards.

“Good game,” said Ron, looking pleased with himself even though he had lost.

“You fared much better this time than in the exhibition match,” said Ak, shuffling his deck back together. “But... not good enough.”

“Yeah yeah, I’ll get you when we play again.”

“Ak!” called Harry suddenly, trying to sound superior. The crowd of students turned to him, and became silent. “It’s time.”

“Alright then,” he said, standing up. “Let’s go.” He waved a hand toward to the holographic-image-generating table. He began walking over to it, and the group of students followed. But, before Harry went over there, he wanted any sort of helpful information that he could get.

“Hey Ron,” he whispered quickly.

“Yeah?” he said, organizing the last few scattered cards.

“How’s his deck?” To this, Ron let out a big sigh.

“It’s really bad.”

“Bad?” asked Harry. “Bad as in... good, right?”

“Bad as in evil.”

“Evil? How so?”

Just as Ron opened his mouth to answer, Ak’s voice rang through the room.

“Harry!” he bellowed. “Are you ready?”

“Fine, I’m coming,” called Harry back, not feeling too confident. As he walked towards the table, the crowd of students parted for him, making a path for him to go through. It was as if he had a shield around him that pushed everyone away from him.

When Harry got to the table, he pulled out the chair opposite of Ak and sat down, staring at Ak’s smiling face. He was shuffling his deck, wearing a very distinct and evil grin.

Apparently, he was trying to intimidate Harry, and psyche him out or something. But, it wasn’t his expression that was affecting Harry, it was the group of students watching them that was. There were so many of them, and they were all compacted into a very small space, all staring right at them... observing their every move. It was like Harry was under a microscope, and hundreds of scientists were trying to look in it at the same time.

Despite all of these distractions, Harry quickly shuffled his deck and put it into the slot in the table. He saw Ak do the same, and the battle began. The table dealt Harry his five starting cards.

“Not too bad,” said Harry to himself, eyeing his starting hand. “A Hippogriff, a Stupefy Spell, an Electo Poli, a Phoenix, and an Engorgio Spell.”

“Now, let’s see who goes first,” said Ak, tapping the table with his wand. A large and shiny coin appeared in the middle of the table. It looked like a larger version of a Galleon. “Do you want wizard or ministry?”

“Huh?” asked Harry, very confused. “What are you talking about?”

“You know,” sighed Ak. “It’s like the Muggle version of heads and tails. There’s a wizard head on one side of a Galleon, and a picture of the Ministry of Magic on the other. Which side do you want?”

“Wizard side,” said Harry. “You know about heads and tails, eh? Are you a Muggle-born, Ak?”

“Well... yeah,” said Ak, not looking as though he were very comfortable about talking about that issue. “You want wizard... okay!” He tapped the holographic coin, and it flew into the air, spun around a few times and then landed back on the table in Harry’s favor.

“It is wizards,” sighed Ak, “you go first.” The galleon disappeared, and the game began. The table dealt Harry his card.

“A Lumos Spell,” said Harry to himself as the card appeared before him. After a few seconds of consideration, he figured out what he was going to play. “For my first action, I’ll play

a phoenix.” Harry grabbed the holographic phoenix, and placed it out on the field. The usual burst of lights came and the small holographic fiery bird appeared, flapping its wings and singing every now and then.

“Next, I will play my Hippogriff.” Harry did the same thing he did with the phoenix, and the very small version of the Hippogriff appeared, flying around the phoenix, and trying to get it to play. “Your turn.”

“Very well,” said Ak, getting his card. “Time for the first step on the journey towards your defeat, Harry. For my first action, I will play Grindelwald, the Dark Wizard.” Ak dragged the card out onto the table and the small Grindelwald appeared. He looked a lot like Voldemort, around the same height and build. However, instead of being white all over, he was rather... bumpy. He had scabs, scars, boils, and blisters all over his skin, nearly covering all of his body. In fact, the only thing that was entirely visible was one eye that had red veins popping out all over. He looked more like something you’d expect to find in a toilet after you’ve thrown up in it than anything else.

“Wow,” said Harry, “I guess this game has been around for a while. Grindelwald died in 1945....”

“Yeah,” said Ak, throwing off Harry’s comment. “Grindelwald is a very vicious card. At any time, I can discard one of my fighters in play to return a fighter from my discard pile or my hand to play. It fits Grindelwald well, he was known for getting rid of old and obsolete followers in exchange for new ones.”

“Great....”

“Now, for my second action, I’m going to play... the Sorcerer’s Stone.” Ak put the card into play, and a blood-red and shiny Stone appeared.

“Now what does that do?”

Ak gave Harry a very wide grin.

“The two cards I have in play now, Harry, make one of the greatest combinations in the entire game. You see, the Sorcerer’s Stone’s ability is, whenever one of my fighters would be discarded, I instead return it to my hand. Now, Grindelwald’s ability’s cost is that I discard one of my fighters, but the Sorcerer’s Stone prevents my fighters from being discarded. So, basically, I can put any number of fighters from my discard pile or hand into play during my turn.”

Harry’s mind was spinning. How could that good of a combo exist? Now, Harry would be unable to discard any of Ak’s fighters... how could he possibly win?

“That’s... good,” said Harry, unable to think of anything else.

“Your turn,” smiled Ak.

“Okay,” gasped Harry. “Well, since Grindelwald’s power is higher than either my phoenix’s or my Hippogriff’s, I’m not going to attack this turn.” Ak nodded, and the table gave Harry his card. Harry did a silent cheer.

“Yes!” he said to himself happily. “A Korosucide Spell! It discards one random card that my opponent has in play. Hopefully it will be the Sorcerer’s Stone....”

“Are you going to do anything?” asked Ak impatiently, leaning back in his chair. Harry shook himself back into reality. He had been staring at the holographic card for a while and didn’t even notice it.

“Yeah. For my first action, I will play... Korosucide!” Harry dragged the card into play and saw that it had an effect on Ak. He immediately sat up and put his hands on the table, knowing that it was a potential threat. Just as he did, the effect of the Korosucide Spell took place. A small mushroom cloud appeared... right over the Sorcerer’s Stone, just as Harry had wanted.

“No!” yelled Ak. “You discarded it!”

“Sure did,” grinned Harry, watching the Sorcerer’s Stone’s glow fade, and then move over to the discard pile. “And now I am going to play an Engorgio Spell on my phoenix, doubling its power from eight to sixteen, one more than Grindelwald’s! Next turn, when I attack, he’s dead! How’s that for a comeback, Ak?”

Ak didn’t say anything. He just let the table give him his card... and then he smiled.

“What are you smiling about?”

“Nothing,” said Ak, letting his face become neutral again. “For my first action, I will play an Apoyosi Spell on Grindelwald here. That spell makes all damage that goes to him, come to me instead. So, he’s safe at least. Next, I’ll play... a Summoning Charm, which lets me draw five cards.”

“Some nice moves,” said Harry, beginning to feel as though he was taking control of the board. “But, I don’t think they’re good enough, Ak.”

“Whatever.”

“It’s my turn now,” announced Harry, “and I will begin by attacking Grindelwald with my phoenix. Since it had the Apoyosi Spell on it, you take sixteen damage, Ak.” Harry watched as the top sixteen cards of his deck went to the discard pile and couldn’t help but smile. He let the table give him his card: another Stupefy. Those wouldn’t be any good right now, though. Ak wouldn’t dare attack with Grindelwald anyways.

“For my first action, I’ll draw a card,” said Harry, not having anything better to do. The table dealt him his card: a Merging Spell. Now, he could combine his souped-up phoenix and Hippogriff into a superior creature. “For my last action, I’ll combine my two fighters into one, using the Merging Spell!”

Harry flicked the card into play, and watched as his two minions became one. They both shone a bright silver, and then flowed together, like liquid metal. It became harder, and took shape. Color started coming back to the creature, and it gave off a single, bright light. What was revealed was a very interesting beast. It had the body of a Hippogriff, but the wings and head of a phoenix. It didn’t look like it could really hold its own in the wild, but it was more than a match for Ak in this game.

“Your turn,” said Harry mockingly. Just three attacks with his new fighter, and the game was over. Harry could taste victory. Ak just sighed, and took his card.

“First, I’ll play another Summoning Charm,” said Ak, getting five more cards. “Then, I’ll play a Banishing Charm.”

“What does that do?” asked Harry curiously.

“Well, I flip a coin,” said Ak, tapping the table with his wand and making the same, large Galleon appear again. “If it’s wizards, then you have to discard all but one card in your hand. If its Ministry, then I have to discard all but one card in my hand.”

“Sound like fun,” said Harry, not having anything really spectacular to lose.

“Let’s go!” cried Ak, flipping the coin. It shot up in the air again, spun around, and then landed. Once again, in Harry’s favor. “Oh no! Ministry!”

Harry let a small chuckle get out as he watched all but one of the cards in Ak’s hands soar over to his discard pile. Harry heard the same from the crowd around him... Ak’s luck was definitely somewhere else today. First Harry went first, then the Korosucide Spell worked perfectly, and now he lost almost his entire hand!

“Too bad,” said Harry. “But, it’s my turn now. Of course, I will attack Grindelwald with my new Hippo-Phoenix, making you lose twenty cards, Ak.”

“Yeah yeah,” he sighed, “I know.”

“Next, I’ll take my card.” The table shot it at Harry: a Fotia Poli. “Excellent. Now I can end this match even sooner.”

“How so?”

“I’m playing Fotia Poli now,” smiled Harry. “In case you don’t know, it makes you discard the top five cards of your deck, unless you have three or more fighters in play, which you obviously don’t.”

“Yeah yeah, I know what it does,” hissed Ak, watching five more cards leave his deck.

“Now, I’ll just draw another card,” said Harry happily. He could have jumped for joy when he saw what it was: another Engorgio Spell. Next turn, he was going to double his Hippo-Phoenix’s power, and finish off Ak.

“My turn,” announced Ak with a very appropriate sad tone to his voice. He took his card, and retained his neutral face. Harry couldn’t tell if what he drew was going to help him or not by his expression, he’d just have to wait and see.

“I’m going to play,” he announced, “the Kamikaze Spell!”

“What does that do?”

“Yet again, I flip a coin,” said Ak, making the Galleon appear again. “If it’s wizard side, you discard all but one card of your deck, if it’s Ministry side, I discard all but one card of my deck.”

“Sounds pretty risky,” said Harry, suddenly getting a small pang of nervousness.

“Yeah, and it comes at a cost too,” sighed Ak. “I have to discard all of my fighters in play... so bye bye Grindelwald.” Harry laughed out loud as Grindelwald exploded in a pussy mess, and then hovered on over to Ak’s ever growing discard pile.

“You’d better hope you get Wizard side up,” said Harry, not wanting at all for that to happen.

“Believe me,” said Ak, tapping the coin with his wand, “I am.” The coin, once again, flew into the air, spun around, and landed with a burst of laughter and shock from the crowd and Harry.

“Ministry side!” exclaimed Harry, nearly falling over in his chair. “Ak! What’s going on with you today?”

“I... don’t... know...” said Ak through gritted teeth as he watch almost all of his cards fly on over to the pile of garbage. “I’ll end my turn early this time.”

“Whatever!” said Harry ecstatically, throwing his hands into the air. He couldn’t believe it. He was going to beat Ak... again! “I’ll just attack you with my Hippo-Phoenix and-”

“Not so fast!” yelled Ak suddenly.

“What?” said Harry. “I’m attacking you with my fighter. The game’s over! I win!”

“Not really...” said Ak with a really horrible grin on his face.

“What are you talking about?” asked Harry, beginning to get a little annoyed. “You have no cards in your deck! I have won!”

“No, Harry,” said Ak quietly. “The battle has just begun. For you see, I am playing... Hell’s Concoction.”

“How can you play that?” yelled Harry. “It’s not even your turn!”

“But that’s just it,” smiled Ak. “Hell’s Concoction only activates under three distinct conditions: one, it has to be in your hand; two, you have to have only used one action during your previous turn; and three, you have to have only one card in your deck.”

“Well,” said Harry, feeling a little nervous, “what does it do?”

Ak’s grin became so wide, Harry thought it was going to fall off his face.

“First of all, it changes the game around so that it’s my turn. Then, it returns all of the cards in my discard pile to my hand, except for ten. Those go back to my deck.”

“What!?” yelled Harry among gasps of shock and surprise from the crowd. “No card can be that powerful!”

“Hell’s Concoction is the potion that brought You-Know-Who back from the dead,” whispered Ak, letting the table give him all but ten of his cards back. “Giving me a few cards is nothing compared to that.”

“That’s...not... fair...” whimpered Harry.

“Life’s never fair,” snarled Ak. “Anyway, back to the game. It’s my turn and I’ll start off my playing an Increase Time Spell. Now I have three actions. For one of them, I’ll play another Sorcerer’s Stone, and for another I’ll play another Grindelwald.”

Ak threw the two cards out on the battlefield, really enjoying Harry’s face of terror.

“And now I will play another Increase Time Spell, and using one of those new two actions, I’ll play a Voldemort.” There were a few screams, but not from seeing Voldemort appear on the field, just from hearing Ak say the name. “Oh, and by the way, Voldemort kills your little Hippo-Phoenix with his ability.”

“Yeah, I know,” spat Harry, watching his fighter die and then move on into his discard pile.

“Now, using Grindelwald’s ability, I’ll discard Voldemort, to put another Voldemort from my hand into play! But, thanks to Mr. Sorcerer Stone over here, the one I discarded stays in play.” The other Voldemort appeared next to the other one, and the two glared at each other, as if trying to prove that only one of them was the real one.

“What!” yelled Harry suddenly. “You have two Voldemorts!” Ak smiled.

“I have more than two Harry... I’ll ‘discard’ the two I have in play now to play two more Voldemorts! What are you going to do now!?”

Two more Voldemort’s materialized on the field, and it was far too many for Harry. He might have been able to deal with one... maybe even two, but four...? How could anyone beat that? The four Voldemort’s appeared to be furious at each other. Apparently, they did not like the idea of there being more than one of themselves.

“And now... Harry... it’s time for you to lose.”

“How so?” questioned Harry, feeling like he wanted to tear out all of his hair.

“I shall play... The Dark Mark card!” Ak slammed it down on the table, and Voldemort’s symbol, the skull with the snake going through the mouth appeared a foot above the table, spinning around and giving off green smoke. Some of the younger students screamed and squealed at the sight of it.

“What does it do?” demanded Harry nervously.

“Shh!” said Ak. “What and see!”

Harry looked at the table, and saw that the four Voldemorts were looking at the Dark Mark, fascinated with its being there.

“What are they doing?”

“They are performing the Dark Mark’s ability,” whispered Ak, watching them. “It is only activated when there are four Voldemorts in play.”

“But what does it do?” asked Harry again.

“Oh, it deals one thousand damage to you,” said Ak as if it were nothing.

“One thousand damage!” yelled Harry.

“Shh!” said Ak again. Now, the four Voldemorts were walking over to the Dark Mark and they spread out around it, making a square if they were connected. Each of them raised their

wands to the Mark, and a red beam shot out of each, hitting it. It glowed red, getting darker and darker every second, until it was such a dark red it was almost black.

Then, suddenly, the Dark Mark exploded. But, this wasn't a normal explosion with gas and smoke, this explosion made skulls, skeletons, spirits, eyes, body parts, everything fly out of the Mark, each thing giving off unearthly screams. Now, the older students joined the younger ones in giving yelps and hiding.

The explosion filled the entire table, and it continued for a while. But, it eventually did clear, and when it did, all of Harry's deck was in the discard pile, and the four Voldemort's had their arms crossed and were smiling.

"I... lost..." said Harry to himself.

"Yes... yes you did," said Ak, grinning.

Just then the crowd around the table burst into applause and cheers. Apparently, they had all loved Ak's spectacular comeback and wanted to show him just how much they liked it, especially since Harry had beaten him last time.

"Hooray for Ak!" they all yelled, patting him on the back and cheering him on. The students gathered around him until the inevitable came, and Ak was lifted on top of all of their shoulders, smiling and cheering along with them. The group of students, with Ak on top as if he had scored the winning touchdown for a football game, marched around the room a few times and then left, leaving Harry all alone, except for his cards... and Ron.

"You played well," said Ron, patting Harry on the back.

"Yeah yeah, whatever," said Harry quickly, taking his deck out of the slot and beginning to feel really terrible. Losing the Dueling Tournament or the Wizard Duel Tournament wasn't so bad if it was only one, but both? Two big losses on top of each other? It was enough to depress even the happiest of men. "I'll beat him next time."

"Sure you will," said Ron, walking his friend out of the deserted room. "It was a great game though, a really spectacular comeback. I mean, no one... no one ever expected him to play that-"

"Okay Ron!" said Harry, putting his hand up in front of Ron's mouth.

"Yeah, sorry," said Ron, clearing his throat and continuing to walk out of the room.

"There you are!" came a very nice voice from just ahead. Harry looked up, and saw Cho in front of them. "I thought you'd never come out of that room! I looked all over for you in that crowd that just came by! But, here you are, so... are you ready to go Harry?"

Chapter 13- Extreme Quidditch

Harry looked up at Cho and immediately, his spirits rose. She was the only thing that could truly cheer him up after miserably losing the final match. She alone had the power to make his spirit dance.

"Well...?" she said again, looking ravishing. She looked more like a goddess than a human; she gave off some sort of aura of wonderfulness wherever she went. Tonight, she was wearing a very tight silvery shirt that was encrusted with what appeared to be thousands of little diamonds. Her pants were actually rather plain in comparison to her top; blue bellbottoms with a few flower patches on them, and her hair was not done up in any particular manner, just down and looking long. But, Harry didn't mind at all. For all he cared, she could have worn a paper bag and she still would have been the most beautiful creature on Earth.

"Hello! Earth to Harry!" said Cho, waving her hand in front of Harry's face. Harry quickly shook himself back into the real world, still wondering how someone like her could possibly like him.

“Oh yeah, I’m ready to go,” said Harry quickly, beaming.

“Excellent,” smiled Cho.

“I’ll see you later, Ron,” said Harry hastily, running up to Cho and blindly waving to his friend.

“Yeah, see you,” said Ron back, sprinting off in the direction of what Harry thought was where Ak and his group of new fans went.

“I’ll be right back Cho,” said Harry. “I just have to change out of my school clothes quickly.”

“Alright,” she said, her arms crossed. “I’ll be right here when you come back.”

“I’ll be back before you know it,” said Harry, running off as fast as he could, all the way back to the Gryffindor Common Room.

“Hey, tough luck there Harry,” said Chris when Harry arrived. He and just a few others were there. Except for a few occasions, this was the emptiest Harry had ever seen the Common Room. “Too bad about your game.”

“Yeah yeah,” said Harry, throwing him off, and sprinting to his dorm room. He quickly tossed off his black school robe, and threw it on his bed. He ran over to the mirror, tidied up his hair to the best of his ability, and went back downstairs. He opened up the door that lead to the rest of the school, and heaved a sigh.

“Oh no, not now!” yelled Harry to himself. He looked in front of him, to the staircases that were usually laid out in some sort of logical pattern. But tonight, they were feeling adventurous, and now... now there was no rhyme or reason to their layout. Some stairs were twisting and turning, looping around others; some were flipped left or right, and others were even totally upside down. “Now how am I going to get back to Cho in time?”

Harry looked around desperately for a staircase that was walkable and found one that headed off in a direction that he had never been to before. Harry ran down it, and arrived at a very old looking and decrepit door. He opened it quickly, and found himself in a dark corridor. But, there was a dim light at the end, and it was the only path that he could take, so Harry ran down it, not having a clue where he was going.

He soon arrived at the end of the tunnel, and it was lit by a single, flickering light bulb that appeared as though it was going to burn out any second. In front of him, there were three tunnels, each with a wooden sign above it.

“Headmaster, Death, and Main Corridor,” read Harry. “Well, I don’t think I’ll take the Death hallway, and Headmaster seems like one for Dumbledore, so I’ll take Main Corridor. Maybe that will take me where I want to go.”

Harry ran down the slightly brighter tunnel, but not for long, and ended up right where the sign had said: The Main Corridor, where the rest of the hallways in the school spread out from.

“Good, I can find my way from here,” said Harry to himself. He looked behind him to see the tunnel that had brought him here, but where he came out, there was now only a wall. “What!? I could’ve sworn that it was here a second ago.”

Harry examined the wall, but couldn’t find a single opening in it. He put his hand up to the wall, and nearly yelled out in surprise. His hand went right through the solid brick! It was a interesting feeling and sight having your hand move through the wall as if it were made out of liquid.

“I wonder how many of these little passageways there are in this place,” said Harry to himself, happy that he had found one of Hogwart’s many secrets. “I’ll explore it later, got to go see Cho now.”

“Absolutely not!” came a very loud voice that made Harry jump. At first, he thought it was from someone who was reading his mind and telling him not to go. Then, he saw that it was coming from one of the rooms in the hall. Harry crept up next to the one that the voice was coming out of and listened through the slightly opened door.

“Sir,” came another voice, much quieter. It sounded very familiar. “You should keep your voice down, a student may hear you.”

“Nonsense,” came the first voice, slightly quieter this time. This one was also familiar, even more so. “All of them are busy praising the new Ak kid for his victory over Harry.”

Just when Harry heard his name said, he immediately knew who that voice belonged to and was surprised he didn’t recognize it sooner. It was Dumbledore! But... how did he know Ak had beaten him? He wasn’t at the room when the club was meeting.

“But, you still haven’t gotten it yet, have you?” came the other voice.

“No,” said Dumbledore. “You-Know-Who has evaded me quite well, and I have been unable to get the Item from him. But I will get it eventually.”

What was Dumbledore talking about? What did Voldemort have... and why was he referring to him as ‘You-Know-Who’? Harry thought that Dumbledore of all people would call Voldemort by his real name.

“So he still has the Legendary Ingredient?”

“I’m afraid so,” sighed Dumbledore.

So it was true! Dumbledore was trying to get the Ingredients for the Immortal Potion away from Voldemort so he couldn’t make it. But, evidently Voldemort already had one, so the wizarding world was in trouble right now.

“Well.... Yeehaw,” said the other voice. Just from that one word, Harry figured out who the other voice was. It was Professor Quirrell. Well, at least he knew for sure now that this Quirrell was definitely on the good side.

“Anyway,” said Dumbledore, “we both have lots of work to do, I think we should cut this meeting short and go back to our labors.”

“Agreed,” said Quirrell. Harry heard them starting to walk out, and began to panic. How could he hide? Then he remembered his Animagus Invisibility Ring! Harry quickly transformed his entire body into the Gryffin, just when the two of them walked out. Harry froze for a second when he saw them exit into the hall, and stand right in front of him. Even though he knew he was invisible, it was still eerie to have them both right there, and not see him. He still felt as though he was going to be caught. Harry held his breath, could feel his heart pounding in his chest, and tried not move at all.

“See you later, Headmaster,” said Quirrell.

“Yes, indeed,” said Dumbledore. Then, he looked in Harry’s direction. “Wait a minute...” Harry’s heart was beating a mile a second, Dumbledore was walking right towards him!

“What is that?” he said again, this time looking directly at Harry. He bent over and put out his arm out, extending it right at him. Harry closed his eyes, waiting for the inevitable.... He could feel his entire body going cold already, awaiting the impact of Dumbledore’s hand on his face.

“Ack!” yelled Dumbledore, peeling something off of the wall and holding it between his fingers. “Bugs on the castle walls! I need to get Filch to clean this place more thoroughly.”

Harry breathed the biggest sigh of relief that he had ever done in his life. He opened his eyes and waited until both Dumbledore and Quirrell were out of sight, and then a little while longer, just to be safe, until he finally turned back into his normal form.

“Oh man,” said Harry, checking his watch. “I have to get back to Cho!” Harry ran as fast as he could all the way back to where she was waiting for him outside the Wizard Duel Club room.

“There you are!” yelled Cho. “What took you so long!?”

“Staircase trouble,” panted Harry, out of breath.

“Well, we’ve got to really hurry now! Let’s go!”

“Alright,” said Harry when he finally caught his breath, “where are we going tonight?” As soon as these words left his mouth, Harry felt a small pang of guilt. So far, it had been Cho who had been planning all of their little excursions; he had never helped in any way. But, Cho didn’t seem to mind at all. In fact, she was smiling.

“Oh... some place I think we’ll both enjoy,” she said as they reached the doors to exit the school. Harry quickly ran ahead and opened the door for her and presented the way with his arms.

“What are you doing?” asked Cho when she saw Harry.

“Um... holding the door for you,” said Harry, getting up from his bent over position.

“Well... don’t,” said Cho, looking quite serious.

“Uh, why not?” asked Harry, letting the door close behind him.

“Well... err...” stuttered Cho. “Well, I just don’t think it’s right that you think you have to treat me differently just because we are different... well, you know.”

“Yeah,” said Harry quickly, not really knowing what to think. Shouldn’t he treat her differently? Cho walked forward and opened the door herself, Harry followed behind.

“I thought your game may go late, so I didn’t want to rent a broom since I wouldn’t know what time to tell him to come,” said Cho when they were outside.

“So, how are we going to get there?” asked Harry.

“With our own brooms,” said Cho, moving to the side, and revealing Harry’s Firebolt and Cho’s... Firebolt?

“I didn’t know you had a Firebolt too!” said Harry, running towards his broom that was hovering slightly off of the ground.

“Well, I recently came into a large sum of money,” smiled Cho, “and I couldn’t think of a better way to spend it then on a Firebolt. Now maybe I can keep up with you when we play again.”

“Oh, you kept up with me fine last time,” said Harry, mounting his broom. “In fact, if it wasn’t for Ak’s knowledge of the rules, we would’ve lost.”

“Oh Harry...” said Cho, mounting her broom and flying up with him. “You keep putting yourself down, you’re even better than you think.”

“So where are we going anyways,” asked Harry now that they were both in the air.

“Just follow me,” said Cho, shooting off far ahead of Harry, her voice trailing.

Harry grinned and flew forward with a massive burst of speed.

“You can’t catch me!” giggled Cho, still ahead of him. She was a really good flier, and the Firebolt only enhanced her natural ability. Harry had to catch up to her somehow....

He got an idea. Harry transformed the top of his back into massive Gryffin wings and flapped them madly, easily and quickly overtaking Cho. Once he got right next to her, she gazed at his wings, and then let out a scream.

“AAAHHH!” she yelled. “Harry! What’s going on!” She began flying erratically from side to side and she lost her grip.

“Cho!” yelled Harry, spinning around and flying down to her. She was falling faster now, getting closer and closer to the ground... could Harry make it in time? He flew down faster,

putting so much energy into making the broom go forward that he felt as though he were running. He could just barely get her now... he had to just think of her as a Snitch!

With this new thought in mind, Harry grabbed onto Cho's shoe and held onto her tightly.

"I've got you!" he yelled down to her.

"Harry!" she yelled to him. "Don't let go!"

"I won't!" yelled Harry back. He gripped his broom now with his legs, and held onto her with both of his hands now. Even though Cho was far from big, she was still not the lightest thing in the world and was getting harder to hold onto. He had to think of something quickly!

"Cho!" Harry yelled down to her. "I'm going to let go!"

"What!?" she screamed back. "I told you not to let go! Don't let go!"

"Don't worry..." Harry said back, letting go of one leg.

"No Harry! No!"

"Don't worry," said Harry. "I'll..."

Just then, Harry's grip finally loosened, and he let go of Cho's other leg.

"Harry!" she yelled as she started falling again.

This time, Harry was prepared. He shot down, right passed Cho, and then stopped in midair, just below her. An instant later, Cho fell down, right onto Harry's broom, less than a foot above the ground.

"Harry!" she yelled, brushing her hair back.

"Yeah?"

"Nice catch," she grinned.

"Thanks," said Harry, flying back up next to Cho's hovering broom.

"But, never do it again."

"Sure thing," said Harry, stopping next to her broom, and letting her get onto it.

"But you did scare me with those wings there."

"I thought you knew I was an Animagus," said Harry when they were back on their way. "After all, most of the school does from watching that Quidditch game."

"Well," sighed Cho, "I guess I missed that match, and no one ever told me my boyfriend could become a bird."

"Well, a gryffin actually."

"Even better," grinned Cho.

The two of them flew on at a regular pace, they didn't want any more falling accidents. Most of the way, Cho stared at Harry's wings. Though, he couldn't blame her: they were rather beautiful after all.

"We're almost there," Cho said a few minutes later. Harry looked around to see if he recognized where he was. There were lights and buildings everywhere, but Harry didn't identify anything.

"Where are we?"

"On the outskirts of Hogsmeade," said Cho. "The 'less formal' part of the town.... Oh! There's where we want to be!" Harry looked where Cho pointed, and saw a large circular building that looked like a slightly smaller version of a Muggle stadium.

"What's in there?"

"The greatest game in the world," said Cho looking quite happy.

"Better than Quidditch?" asked Harry, slightly appalled.

"Oh yes," said Cho. "Definitely. Follow me inside, I've got reservations."

"Alright," said Harry, wondering what game could be possibly be better than Quidditch.

Cho did a fancy swerve down towards the ground, and Harry followed. They flew past the buildings and lights, and right above the heads of the mass of people below them, not to mention some other brooms flying by. Harry was amazed that all of this was hidden from the Muggle world. It must have taken some very powerful spells to pull it all off.

After just a few seconds of soaring through the small city, Cho stopped at the entrance of the stadium, and Harry did the same.

“We can keep out brooms here,” said Cho, propping hers up against a large wall that had some other brooms on it, though no other Firebolts. Just when the tip of her broom touched the wall, a small hand erupted out of it and grabbed the handle of the broom, holding it securely in place.

“Those aren’t real hands, are they?” asked Harry tentatively.

“Oh no,” said Cho. “It’s just an enchantment, though a very secure one. But come on and put yours up, we’ve got to get going!”

“Alright,” said Harry, letting a hand grab his broom too. “Lead the way!”

Cho led Harry through a massive, semi-oval shaped opening in the side of the stadium. Harry saw that he and Cho were not alone going through, there were hundreds of other people all walking through the door as well, all talking excitedly.

“Where are we going?” asked Harry, trying to follow Cho through the throng of people, none of which he recognized from Hogwarts. All of them looked as though they were eighteen or twenty year olds, previous students, but not quite yet adults. Also, each of them appeared to be punks: varying colors of spiked hair with black jackets and sunglasses. Kind of like more extreme versions of Bill Weasley.

“To our seats,” said Cho, grabbing hold of Harry’s hand and leading him into the heart of the stadium that was filled with even more people, only slightly more organized into lines before three goblin cashiers. She pulled him along a bit more, passed the goblins, and through another massive, semi-oval shaped door.

The room that Harry entered now was completely different from the previous ones. There were hundreds, of not thousands of small, skinny cylindrical posts with a different colored sphere on top, popping up every few feet that seemed to fill acres of floor. But, the most surprising thing about the room was that there was not a single person in sight.

“What is this room?” Harry asked.

“It’s the Portkey Room,” said Cho, seeming as though she was looking around for something in particular. “From here, you are taken to your seat by touching the correct sphere.”

“Well, which one is ours?”

“This one!” exclaimed Cho, pointing to a golden one that was right up front. “Top notch seats! I’ve had them reserved for a while, just for this occasion. Touch it with me and we’ll be taken there.”

Harry and Cho reached their arms out towards the golden sphere and touched it at the same time. Just when they did, Harry felt the usual Portkey Transportation feeling. It was as if there was a hook, just behind his navel, that tugged him into the sphere, a black oblivion forming all around him.

The nothingness lasted for only a second. An instant later, Harry found himself in a small, white room with one entire wall made of glass. Outside of the clear wall, Harry could see the entire playing field. On one side, there were three hoops of varying height, and the same on the other side. The field seemed very familiar....

“Wait a minute, Cho,” said Harry. “This is just a Quidditch field.”

“Well, not really,” she said.

“How so?”

“You’ll see,” said Cho. “Sit down, Harry.” She waved an arm to four large and comfortable looking red chairs that were lined up next to each other. Harry sat down in one, and he could still see the entire field. These really were good seats.

“How much longer until the game starts?” asked Harry, bouncing up and down in his chair, wondering what it was going to be like

“Well, thanks to your delays,” said Cho sarcastically, checking her watch, “about... right now!”

“LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!” boomed a voice that was only rivaled in volume by the giants. Even though the actual announcer was nowhere near him, the sound still blew Harry backwards into his chair. “WELCOME TO THE FIRST MATCH OF THE YEAR IN EXTREME QUIDDITCH!”

“Extreme Quidditch?” asked Harry, his ears ringing already.

“Yeah, it’s really cool,” said Cho on the edge of her seat.

“PLEASE WELCOME THE VISITING TEAM... THE LONDON LACERATORS!”

The crowd around the playing field burst into a mass of applause and boos as eight players flew out on the field, waving their arms madly and doing fancy midair tricks. Harry noticed that all of their brooms were severely damaged, bandaged up all over with splinters sticking out and cracks everywhere. Each of the players were wearing massive gloves and hockey masks, preventing Harry from seeing their faces. But, through their black and metallic uniforms, Harry could see that their arms were heavily scarred and bruised all over.

“Why are there eight players?” asked Harry, noticing that there was one more than usual.

“Well, there’s the normal seven players,” said Cho, leaning closer to Harry so he could hear them, “and then there’s a Placer. At first, he plays as a mixture of a Chaser and a Beater, but then, when a player dies, he takes over that player’s previous position.”

“Dies?” gulped Harry.

“Oh yeah,” nodded Cho. “In Extreme Quidditch, players do tend to do that. Most teams would like to have three or four Placers, you know, so that they can replace their other teammates after the first one dies.”

“Sounds horrid,” shuddered Harry.

“It’s great,” said Cho, turning her attention back towards the field.

“AND NOW... THE HOME TEAM! THE HOGSMEADE HELL-RAISERS!”

Eight more players flew out onto the field, wearing the same gloves and masks and the same quality brooms, only these ones were wearing red uniforms instead of black. Again, the stadium erupted into applause, only adding the already off-the-charts amount of noise that was going on.

“PLAYERS! TO YOUR POSITIONS!” thundered the announcer. The sixteen players shot over to their spots: the Keepers to the goals, the Chasers lined up in front of each other, the Beaters were above them, the Seeker was above them, and then the Placer was out flying around the field, ready for anything. Even though Harry couldn’t see their faces, he could tell that the players were spitting and screaming at each other by the fluids pouring out of their masks.

“RELEASE THE BALLS!”

In the middle of the field, a small hole opened up and the Quaffle, then the Bludgers, then the Snitch shot out.

“Well, other than the Placers and the extreme amount of violence, the actual game is not so different than regular Quidditch,” observed Harry.

“NOW! SET THE FIELD!”

All of a sudden, dozens of smaller holes appeared in the ground along with another much larger one. Massive flames that went high above the stadium's top poured out of the smaller holes, and a chained down Hungarian Horntail popped out of the larger one, gave an ear shattering roar, and then beginning to spew more flames all around, making the air nothing more than one giant inferno.

"Okay," squeaked Harry, slouching back in his chair from fear, "maybe it is a little different than regular Quidditch."

"READY!..." boomed the announcer. "SET!... GO!"

The effect of the announcer's words was instantaneous. All of the players shot off in every direction, though mostly towards each other. Two of the Chasers on the London team immediately went for two Chasers from the Hogsmeade team. They crashed in midair, and there was a fantastic boom and burst of fire. The announcer said something, but even his insanely loud voice was drowned out by the crowd that was now in an ecstatic frenzy.

"AND HOGSMEADE MAKES THE FIRST GOAL! ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY TO ZERO!"

"One hundred and fifty to zero!" exclaimed Harry. "But... they only scored one goal!"

"Yeah, but the rules are a bit different for Extreme Quidditch," explained Cho, looking through the window. "Goals are worth one hundred and fifty points and the Snitch is only worth ten, but it still ends the game."

"Why did they switch the points around?"

"Because if they kept the score for the Snitch the same," continued Cho, "all the players on the opposing teams would instantly go for their opponent's Seekers, and the Placers would be used up almost immediately."

"Oh... ok," said Harry, much happier that he was watching the game rather than playing in it.

Harry made attempts to see where the Quaffle currently was, but between the fire, smoke and dragon breath, it was impossible to see anything, except-

"AAAHHH!" yelled Harry and Cho together. One of the players on the London team had just crashed into their window. His face and hands were pressed up against the glass so hard that blood was coming out. But, he quickly pushed himself off and pulled his mask back down over his face.

"Sorry," he mouthed to the two of them as he flew away, back into the game. The Hungarian Horntail shot a gigantic ball of fire, molten rock and smoke right at him that knocked him out of the sky and then down to the ground. The London Placer quickly took his place, and the dragon gave a smile.

"You know Harry..." said Cho, scooting over closer to him. "You know what all this fire, blood, violence and dragons makes me want to do?"

"What?" asked Harry, scooting in closer as well.

"It makes me want to..." said Cho, closing her eyes. "Kiss you."

Cho moved in for the kill, and her target was Harry's lips. But, this was one attack Harry did not want to avoid. He brought his face a little closer to hers as well. He could feel their heads coming closer and closer together... then their mouths touched.

"Why thank you!" came a voice suddenly.

"That's an odd thing to say," said Cho.

"Uh... I didn't say it," said Harry, wondering what was going on. He opened his eyes and saw in front of him not Cho's face, but a very massive and very round head.

“Ah!” yelled Cho, scurrying back. “What are you doing!?”

“Getting in on your little love-in,” piped the creature, smiling and battering his eyebrows. He looked almost exactly like the kid Harry had to fight at the Wizard Duel club meeting; big head and small body, only this one’s head was even bigger, and his body was even smaller. He had a tiny black jacket on, and what appeared to be extremely small wings popping out of his back.

“What are you doing here!?” screamed Cho. “I reserved this box for Harry and me weeks ago!”

“Ahem,” squeaked another creature that looked identical to the other that came into view from behind one of the other chairs. “We also reserved this place weeks ago. You can check our tickets.” He handed Cho two small pieces of paper and she ripped them out of his tiny hand. After a quick examination, she handed them back to him, looking venomous.

“And after all,” said the first one, “there are four chairs here after all!”

“Yeah,” sighed Cho, falling back into her chair and crossing her arms. “I suppose so.” The two creatures smiled at each other with their enormous mouths and sat down in the two chairs next to Harry.

“I just love... fire,” said one of the creatures, conjuring a bag of popcorn.

“And I love Quidditch!” squealed the one that was closest to Harry.

“Will you keep it down?” yelled Harry, putting a finger to his lips.

“Hey!” piped the one that was in the chair next to Harry. “Nice ring!”

“Yeah,” said Harry, quickly hiding his hand from sight. But, the creature followed his hand into the cushion of the chair. “Thanks.”

“How much you want for it?” interjected the other one immediately, jumping off of his chair and walking in front of Harry. He reached into his pocket, and took out a large sum of money. “I have hundreds of galleons....”

“No,” said Harry firmly. “It’s not for sale.”

“Are you sure?” asked the creature again, grinning and pushing the money further towards Harry’s face so far that it was in danger of going up his nose.

“Yes,” said Harry sternly, pushing the money back.

“Why not?” asked the other one curiously.

“It’s a... family heirloom,” said Harry quickly. “It has great sentimental value.”

The creatures eyed him inquisitively with their massive eyes for a second. Then, the one that had been offering him money put it all away, shrugged, and walked back to his seat, talking quietly with his friend.

“Is that really an heirloom?” Cho asked Harry.

“I don’t know,” shrugged Harry back. “For all I know, it could very well be.”

“What, did you buy it?”

“Yeah.”

“Cool,” said Cho. “You’ll have to take me to the shop sometime. It’s a really nice ring, maybe they have more of them.”

“Maybe,” sighed Harry, highly doubting that there would be another like his anywhere.

“AND LOOK AT THAT DRAGON GO!” continued the announcer. “THAT’S THREE GUYS HE’S TAKEN DOWN TODAY!”

Harry returned to watching the game that now had several less people playing in it than before. Harry tried to make out some of the players on the field, but it was even harder now than before, since there were fewer of them and they were more spread out, except for the ones that were engaged in individual fights.

“OH NO! AND THE HOGSMEADE SEEKER IS DOWN!.... WAIT A MINUTE! NO! HE WAS JUST GOING DOWN TO GET THE SNITCH! HOGSMEADE WINS ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY TO ZERO!”

The announcer said something else, but it was quickly drowned out by the roaring crowd. Amidst the lowering flames and the leaving dragon, fans from the stands leapt out of their seats and down onto the field, congratulating their team by suffocating them with their bodies.

“Well that was a short game,” said the little person next to Harry, sounding a little annoyed and disappointed.

“Yeah, too bad,” said Cho mockingly. “Why don’t you two leave now... go on! Shoo!” She waved her arms furiously in the direction of the Portkey that brought them there.

“Nah,” said the one father away. “We’re going to stay here for a while, until the crowd calms down and we won’t get hurt if we try to leave.”

“Great,” sighed Cho. She leaned in closer to Harry and whispered, “Now we’ll never get any time together.”

“Why don’t we just go somewhere else?” whispered Harry back, looking at the two little things run face-first into the window and then drop to the floor giggling.

“No, most of the places are closed by now, and the ones that are open are just low-life taverns.”

“How about we go back to Hogwarts, then?” suggested Harry. “Maybe, if we’re lucky, no one’s out in the halls now. But, if there are some, we could just do this some other time.”

“Sounds better than nothing,” groaned Cho, standing up. She turned to the two little creatures. “Boys... it has been a pleasure, but I’m afraid we have to go now. See you later.”

“Bye bye!” they called back, banging their massive heads on the window.

“Freaks,” muttered Harry as he walked over to the Portkey with Cho. They touched the sphere together and were brought back to the same, giant room that had all the transports to the seats in it. Harry expected to see many people leaving now, but there was not a person in sight.

“Where is everyone?” Harry asked as they started walking out.

“What do you mean?”

“Isn’t everyone leaving now?” continued Harry as they passed the goblin cashiers, two of which were asleep. “I mean, the game’s over.”

“Nah,” said Cho, shaking her head. “Now, the fun’s just starting. The crowd will party with the winning team for hours.”

“So why aren’t we down there?”

Cho looked at him.

“Trust me... you don’t want to be there.”

“Cho,” asked Harry when they exited the stadium through the huge open space, “how do you know so much about this Extreme Quidditch? Have you come to these games before?”

“Only once,” she said, “to test it out. My friends, however, have been coming for a few months now.”

“Do they like it?”

“Well, they more like the fact that prisoners are getting their just punishments.”

“What?” asked Harry, confused. “What does Extreme Quidditch have to do with prisoners?”

Cho stopped in her tracks.

“It has everything to do with prisoners!” she exclaimed. “Who do you think those people are playing on the teams?”

“Crazy people?” shrugged Harry.

"No. They're all prisoners," said Cho. "Ever since Azkaban was destroyed, the Ministry has been trying to find out new ways to punish criminals. It wasn't until Dumbledore suggested Extreme Quidditch that there has been a real good solution."

"Dumbledore suggested it!" yelled Harry.

"Oh yeah," said Cho. "It's an ingenious thought, really. It punishes prisoners by making practically putting them on death row every game, it gives entertainment to the people, and it brings in revenue for the Wizarding Government."

"So Extreme Quidditch is still relatively new?" asked Harry, continuing to walk.

"Well, its only been around since the beginning of summer, so yes, I guess that constitutes as new."

They had finally arrived outside the stadium and were at the wall where they hung up their brooms. Cho reached up and took hers down quite easily. As soon as she touched her broom, the hand holding onto it let go immediately.

"Go on," she said, mounting her broom. "Get yours now."

"Alright," said Harry, reaching up to his. He grabbed onto the tip of the broom and tried to bring it down. But, no matter how hard he tried to pull the broom off of the wall, the hand would simply not let go.

"Err.... Get down!" yelled Harry, trying to tear it off of the wall now. He was shaking the broom furiously, almost in danger of breaking it. However, the hand was not budging a bit.

"What's wrong?" asked Cho, flying up a little

"My... broom... won't... come off!" yelled Harry, still trying.

"Oh come on," grinned Cho. "It's not that hard."

"Yes... it... is! It just won't!"

Suddenly, Harry heard a very high pitched shriek ring out around Harry and Cho. He quickly let go of the broom, and looked around.

"What was that?" asked Cho, landing back on the ground.

"I don't know," said Harry quietly, taking out his wand.

The shriek raised its ugly head again and Harry covered his ears. This time, it sounded much closer and was followed by a softer sound, like a cat landing on the ground.

"I think someone's here," whispered Harry, looking all around.

"Oh no..." said Cho, sounding nervous.

Once again, the shriek rang out and it was as if it came from right behind Harry. He quickly turned around, and behind him he saw one of the little people that was in the box with him and Cho. They were the ones making the sound.

"Ack! Not you!" yelled Harry, putting his wand away and covering his ears. "Stop making that noise!"

The creature gave a smile, but this time, its mouth was filled with sharp fangs rather than normal teeth. It spread out its arms and flew right at Harry, utilizing its wings. The thing was much stronger than it looked; it pushed Harry over right on the ground and pinned him there.

"What are you doing!?" yelled Harry, fumbling for his wand.

"What...? Don't you recognize me Harry?" grinned the creature. It put one of its tiny arms up to its face and then... pulled it right off, as if it were a mask. But, once Harry saw what was under the mask, the fact that he had worn a mask before didn't matter. He tried to yell for help, but all he could do was say the name of the person whose face he saw.

"Wormtail..."

Chapter 14- Surprises

“That’s right Harry!” yelled Wormtail. It was an eerie sight. The thing had Wormtail’s head, but the tiniest body in the world, not to mention fairy-like wings. Even though it was subduing Harry at the moment, he still had to try hard not to laugh. But, despite its comical look, Harry still had to do something.

“Cho!” Harry yelled. “Fly away and get help!”

“I’m trying!” she replied. “But this one isn’t letting me go!”

Harry looked over and saw that she was being pinned down by the other little person that shared their box. He had also taken his mask off, but Harry didn’t recognize who he really was.

“What do you want, Wormtail?” asked Harry through gritted teeth.

“You know what I want,” he said, making the rest of his body grow back to its normal size. “I want your Ring! Well, actually, I don’t want it... my master does, for another one of his beautiful plans. Remember, Harry, in the stands I offered you money for it, but you declined. Now, I’m afraid I’ll just have to take it.”

“Oh yeah,” said Harry. “What are you going to do? You can’t hurt me... remember? I saved your life. Any spell you use on me will just be reflected back onto you.”

To this, Wormtail just grinned.

“Yes, that is true,” said Wormtail, reaching into his pocket for something. “But, that shield can only protect you from magic. There’s nothing preventing me from using Muggle tools against you.” From his pocket, he took out a small dagger.

“Fine! Fine!” said Harry, trying to quickly make a plan in his mind. “I’ll give you the Ring, but leave Cho alone!”

“Hmm...” thought Wormtail. “I think... not.”

“What!?” yelled Harry, his plan suddenly being flushed down the drain. Wormtail grabbed hold of Harry’s hand, the one with the rings on it.

“I think I’ll keep the girl... and just cut the ring off!”

“NO!”

Wormtail brought the knife back to get some momentum on it and then brought it forward, aiming right for Harry’s finger.

An instant before the cold, sharp metal came in contact with Harry’s flesh, he did the only thing he could think off. Harry did the fastest Gryffin transformation he ever did in his life. Wormtail missed his now invisible paw.

With his increased Gryffin strength, Harry flipped Wormtail over onto the hard pavement. He ran over to Cho who was still pinned on the ground by the now fully grown Death Eater. Harry head-butted him off of her and threw her onto his own back.

“Cho!” Harry yelled, quickly transforming his head into his normal form. “Hit the hand holding my broom with some sort of spell and get it off! Wormtail must have enchanted it or something!”

“Alright,” she said, looking a little shaken. She took her wand out and aimed it at the hand holding onto Harry’s broom. “Siragus!”

There was a small explosion on the wall, and when the smoke cleared, the hand was severely damaged, more than enough for Harry to easily pluck his broom off of it. Harry

transformed his head back into the gryffin form, and flew high into the air, well out of the way of the magical beams that Wormtail and his cohort were shooting at them.

“Here, you can get on your broom now,” said Harry after they had been flying for a little while, only transforming his mouth this time.

“No,” said Cho, breathing deeply. “I think I’d rather just ride you home the rest of the way.”

She put her arms around his mane, and gripped tightly.

Even though Cho couldn’t tell through Harry’s transformed gryffin mouth, he had the biggest smile on his face that he had ever had in his life.

“I really had fun tonight, Harry,” said Cho once they reached Hogwarts. Harry had purposely taken a longer route back to the castle, with the hopes of having an empty castle to themselves. But, with the later curfew instituted by Dumbledore, children were crawling throughout the halls everywhere. The two of them didn’t want to take too much of a risk, so they decided to call it a night. They stopped at the hallways coming out of the Great Hall that led to the four houses’ common rooms.

“Even though falling off the broom wasn’t too hot, those two idiots taking our room, and then that whole attacking thing at the end totally wrecked it,” continued Cho, “flying home on you made up for it.”

“Any time,” smiled Harry.

“Let’s try to do this again sometime... that is, without all the bad parts,” said Cho as she bent down a little and gave Harry a kiss.

“I think that’s a great idea,” grinned Harry.

“See you later,” said Cho, walking back to the Ravenclaw Common Room.

“See you,” said Harry waving good-bye. After she walked out of sight, Harry did a few spins out of pure happiness and then started on his way back to the Gryffindor Room.

As he was walking, thoughts were buzzing in Harry’s mind. All that he had seen, heard and experienced this night was coming back to him. Dumbledore confirming Harry’s suspicions that Voldemort was after the Ingredients for the Immortal Potion, Cho, the Extreme Quidditch match, Cho, Dumbledore establishing a very violent method for exterminating criminals, Cho, and Wormtail attacking him and demanding the Ring, and last but definitely not least, Cho... again.

So... Voldemort was taking more desperate measures to get Harry’s Ring. He wasn’t just coming into his dreams anymore, now he was all out attacking him in a public place. Harry had to be careful, especially when field trip time came around.

“Speaking of which,” said Harry to himself when he had reached the door to the common room. “The field trip’s not too far away now... only about two months.... Wizard Duel.” The portrait of the Fat Lady swung open after hearing the password that Harry had insisted upon. When he walked in, he saw that Ron and Hermione, along with only about one or two others, were the only ones still up. They were sitting in the two massive chairs that were before the fire, but Harry noticed that the chairs were pushed closer together now than they usually were.

“Hey there you two,” called Harry to them when he walked in.

“Oh, hello Harry,” said Ron back, turning around. “You’re back kind of quick. Did you have a fun night?”

“Oh...nothing too out of the ordinary,” said Harry back, pulling up a chair next to them. “A little Quidditch match, a lot of fire, and even a cameo appearance by Wormtail. Yeah, it was fun.”

“Wormtail was there?” said Hermione concernedly.

“Yeah, him and another Death Eater,” said Harry, sitting down. “They were disguised as little fairly-like creatures with big heads.”

“What were they doing there?” asked Ron.

“What do you think?” said Harry sarcastically, holding up his hand and pointing to his skull ring. “They want this... or at least, Voldemort does.”

“So he does know about the Ring... not good,” said Hermione.

“Yeah, but that’s not all he knows about,” sighed Harry.

“Why, what else does he know?”

“Well,” said Harry, scooting in even closer to them and checking around to make sure that the others in the room were nowhere near hearing distance of the three of them. “When I was walking back from my room to meet Cho, I accidentally found myself in this part of the castle that I’d never seen before. From there, I managed to get out into the main hallway and I heard Dumbledore talking to Quirrell.”

“Quirrell?” asked Ron, scrunching his face a little.

“Yeah, Quirrell,” continued Harry. “Anyway, Dumbledore said to him that Voldemort already has one of the Ingredients, and he’s failed to get it from him.”

“He said Voldemort’s got one!?” exclaimed Hermione.

“Yeah,” said Harry, remembering that Dumbledore referred to Voldemort as You-Know-Who and not by his real name.

“Well,” said Hermione, trying to find something to be cheerful about, “he’s only got one. I have one too, the Bracelet; and Dumbledore has the other, the Watch; and Professor McGonagall has the Sorcerer’s Stone; and you, Harry, have the Ring. So, as long as things stay the same as they are now, we’re in no trouble.”

“Yeah... if things stay the way they are,” sighed Ron.

“Oh come on Ron!” said Hermione, hitting him on the arm. “Try and look on the bright side of life.”

“Anyway,” said Harry, trying to follow Hermione’s advice and change the subject, “what are you two doing down here anyway?”

To this, Hermione and Ron looked at each other and grinned.

“Oh Harry...” said Hermione. “You know we’d never pass up a chance to hear how it went with you and Cho.”

The weeks went by, and the excitement for the field trip was building to almost the point of explosion. All that anyone was talking about, except for the first years of course, was the trip. Even Harry, Malfoy, Ron, and Hermione were drawn into a few conversations. From these, they figured out that it would actually be a very exciting time. Students would form groups of five, and along with a guide, they could go anywhere they wanted inside the pyramid. In fact, the only bad part about the trip was that it started the day after Christmas. Even though this didn’t affect Harry too much, students that would like to see their families over the winter holidays were a little hurt. But, their pain was short-lived. Once they remembered why they would not be seeing their families this holiday, they practically forgot all about them.

Despite all of this excitement, December twenty-fifth rolled around, much faster than Harry expected it to. As usual, and it was practically a tradition now, Harry was awoken by a forcefully thrown present from Ron, right on his face.

“Arg!” groaned Harry from the impact. This year, he had perfected his aim and had hit Harry’s face with a corner of the box. “Stop doing that!”

“Sorry,” said Ron, not very apologetically. “Force of habit.”

Harry sat up and pulled his glasses on over his face, letting the world come into focus around him. He saw that Ron was at the end of his bed, piling his presents up in one massive stack. Seamus and Dean were getting right down to the point and tearing the paper off of their gifts, revealing the goodies hidden within. Harry looked down at Neville’s bed and was unsurprised to see that he wasn’t there, and neither were his presents. He was probably spending his Christmas with Voldemort.... In fact, that’s probably where he had spent the nights for the past two months, no one had seen him anywhere but classes since the last Dueling Club meeting.

“Come on Harry!” yelled Ron again, making his gigantic stack of piles float in the air in front of him as he walked behind them. “Hermione wants us to open them together... again.”

“Yeah, that’s so bad,” said Harry, climbing out of bed and waddling over to his gifts. He gave a big yawn and put the same spell on his that Ron did to the presents he got. He magically lifted them up, too tired to carry them manually. He followed Ron downstairs to the common room which was filled with students, all taking part in the holiday cheer.

“Hey Harry!” called Mike, swinging a massive mug of Butterbeer from side to side, looking almost intoxicated. “Come and join our fun!” He waved his arm in the direction of Akshay, Joe and Chris, each of whom was doing the same, only their arms were around each other’s necks, and they were swaying from side to side, each drunkenly singing a different song.

“No, that’s okay,” said Harry, squinting an eye.

“I didn’t think that stuff was so strong,” said Ron, looking over in their direction.

“For some... I guess it is.”

The two of them walked over to the same corner that they went to last year, with Hermione already there, with her small pile of presents too.

“What took you so long?” she demanded.

“Harry slept in again,” said Ron, setting his pile down and walking over to her. “Like usual.”

“Hey, it’s not my fault you take so long to wake me up,” grinned Harry, sitting down next to them with his stack nearby.

“Yeah yeah, sure,” Ron said, already working on his first gift, along with Hermione who was furiously opening hers.

Harry went along with the crowd and started on his presents. He opened the first one, the usual: a cake from Mrs. Weasley, along with a new sweater for him that was just his size. There were a few other things from Mrs. Figg, Hagrid, Sirius, and even Lupin this time. But, the one Harry was most looking forward to opening was the one from Fred and George.

“I’ve never gotten a present from just the two of them before,” said Harry, holding the gift up to his ear and shaking it.

“Well, they’ve never had anything to really give before now,” said Ron, looking over his pile of wrappings and empty boxes to see if there was anything else left to be opened.

Harry set the present down and grabbed the ribbon. He pulled it off, and the gift opened itself, like another one of their magical toys. Once it was fully open, a note shot up right at Harry’s face. He grabbed it and read it to himself:

Dear Harry,

We know how much you love these things, and you’re not alone. These packs of cards are still the fastest selling and hottest items at our store. We would have given you more, but at the time

when we sent the present, there weren't many of them left. Don't worry, though, we'll make up for it soon.

See you later,
Fred and George

"Hmm..." said Harry sarcastically to himself. "I wonder what it could be now?" He opened the small box, tore past the next layer of packaging and revealed his present.

"What is it?" asked Ron, peering over.

"Wizard Duel card packs!" grinned Harry, picking up the four packages and showing them to Ron.

"Only four packages?" said Ron.

"Yeah, well, it's four more than I would have normally gotten," said Harry, setting three of them down so he could begin by opening one of them. He pulled the thin, shiny paper apart, and started shuffling through the cards inside, to get to the end quickly and see what his rare one would be. When Harry saw what it was, he dropped the other cards in the pack on the floor, and his mouth fell open.

"What!" yelled Ron, seeing Harry's expression. "What did you get?"

"I got..." gasped Harry, turning the card around so they could see it. "I got... Dumbledore!"

"Dumbledore!" exclaimed Ron and Hermione. Ron quickly grabbed it out of Harry's hand and looked at it with an awestruck expression on his face.

"Wow!" he said, reading it over. "This thing is even better than Voldemort... and its even rarer too!"

"Well I would certainly hope so," said Hermione, trying her best not to look interested. Harry grabbed the card out of Ron's hand and looked at it. It showed Dumbledore in a very interesting situation: he was in a long and flowing blue robe and was dancing around, making it billow out every now and then. Like Voldemort's card, this one was also holographic; the image was popping out of the card.

"Well... aren't you going to open your other packs?" asked Hermione after Harry spent the next several seconds drooling over his new card.

"What...? Oh! Yeah!" Harry quickly shoved his Dumbledore card into his deck, and grabbed one of his other packs. He tore the packaging right off and looked through them until he got to the rare one.

"Oh... my... god..." whispered Harry.

"What?" asked Ron.

"Look at this!" yelled Harry, showing him the card.

"Another Dumbledore!" yelled Ron, looking as if he was in a state of disbelief.

"Wow Harry," said Hermione. "I don't know much about the game, but I'd say the odds of getting two Dumbledores is pretty high."

"Yeah, come on Harry," said Ron. "Open your next pack! Who knows... maybe you'll get another Dumbledore."

"Yeah right," said Harry, still in a state of shock as he put his next Dumbledore into his deck and opened his next pack. "Imagine if I did get another-" Harry stopped. He got to the rare card in his pack and could have fainted right there.

"Another Dumbledore?" sighed Ron.

"Yeah," gasped Harry, showing it to them.

Ron grunted.

“Man, I can’t believe you!”

Harry quickly opened his last pack and just threw all the non-rare cards in the air, to get to it faster. As expected, there was another dancing Dumbledore, right there before him. Harry quickly turned it to show his two friends, and then collapsed on the floor.

“Geez Harry,” said Ron, crawling over to him. “First you’re made Prefect, then you’re Gryffindor Quidditch team captain, then you’re the Dueling Club captain and champion, then you get Cho, then you get a near perfect O.W.L score, and now... now you have four Dumbledores.”

“Yeah,” said Harry, thinking just how lucky he really was. “But... I didn’t beat Ak at the Wizard Duel club.”

Ron shook his head and snapped his fingers.

“Well, I guess you’re just a failure,” he grinned.

“Yeah, I am really pathetic,” smiled Harry, sitting up and putting his last two new cards into his deck.

“Come on you two,” said Hermione. “We should get packed up a little... we are leaving tomorrow after all.”

After a few more laughs on how bad Harry was at everything, the three of them cleaned up their massive mess and trudged back to their rooms, where they packed their bags in preparation of the trip.

Harry, along with most of the rest of the school, didn’t get much sleep that night. Even after the lights went out, it still took several hours for him to finally fall asleep, and when he did he might as well not have been seeing as he woke up only a few minutes later.

This time, Harry didn’t want to be woken up by Ron’s shakings, so he set a magical alarm for the first time in his life. Harry set it so that only he could hear it, and woke up before anyone else. He grabbed the small trunk that he had packed the day before and walked downstairs when the sun was just beginning to rise outside. Harry took a moment to look at the beautiful sight, and when he turned around to peer out the glass, he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around and sighed when he saw who it was.

“Good morning Dobby,” he groaned.

“Sir!” he piped. “This is your last chance! You must leave with me now!”

“No Dobby!” yelled Harry, loudly enough to scare Dobby a little, but quietly enough so that he wouldn’t wake anyone else up. “I am going on the field trip and nothing bad is going to happen!”

“Please sir! If-”

“NO!” yelled Harry, much louder this time. “No. Please... just let me go.”

“Oh sir...” he sighed. “You are going to be wishing you had not gone....”

“Don’t count on it Dobby,” said Harry, picking up his trunk again and leaving the common room. “I’ll see you in a few days.”

“I am doubting it,” he squeaked a moment before he disappeared.

Harry walked all the way down to the Great Hall, keeping a close eye out for Dobby the whole time. When he arrived down in the room, Harry was surprised by seeing a few others down there, including Joe.

“What are you doing down here so early?” Harry asked, sitting down.

“Meh couldn’t sleep,” he groaned, leaning one side of his face on his hand. “Too excited.”

“I know what you mean,” said Harry, lying back in his chair and trying to work in a few minutes of rest before they left. But, his moment of peace didn’t last very long. Just a little while later, the rest of the school came pouring down into the room.

“Hey!” called Ron when he and Hermione arrived down. “You’re up before me for once!”

“First time for everything,” yawned Harry, getting himself up from his little nap.

“How much longer until we go?” asked Ron, sitting down and checking his watch.

“It should only be a few minutes now,” said Hermione. “Dumbledore is supposed to make an announcement—”

“Hello students!” Dumbledore suddenly spoke. “Hello! Good morning to you all. Are you ready for a field trip?”

“YEAH!” everyone yelled. Harry looked around and saw that now, all the second years and above were in the room. That place sure filled up quickly when people were excited.

“Well...” he continued, sounding a little less enthusiastic. “I have a very big surprise for you all then.”

“What is it?” screamed Joe and Mike together, still acting a little drunk from the Butterbeer.

“Well... you see, I’m afraid the trip has been cancelled.”

Chapter 15- Hufflepuff’s New Seeker

At first, the Hall seemed to be in a state of shock. Everyone was just staring at Dumbledore, as if waiting for him to change his announcement, and say that he was only joking, and the trip was still on. But... no such statement came.

“WHAT!?” yelled Chris suddenly, breaking the silence. The Great Hall filled with very loud chatter, and everyone saying pretty much the same thing.

“What does he mean the trip’s off!?”

“How can he do that!?”

“Can he do that!?”

“Now I won’t see any pyramids....”

“Please... please...” continued Dumbledore, putting his arms out and barely beginning to cease the talk. “I apologize profusely for the lateness of this announcement, but I would not have cancelled the trip if it was not for extreme circumstances. I have to say, that if we left for this trip now, there is little chance that any of you would come back alive.”

That shut up the chatter. Everyone trusted his word, and if he said they were in danger, then they were all definitely in danger. There was no room for argument.

“However,” said Dumbledore, now putting a single finger up, “while the trip is cancelled now, it may only be postponed for later. As of now, the field trip is scheduled for late May. I ask you all to return here at that time in the same position you are now, and please, no revolts. So, now, would you please all check the schedule for the next week as you will be here now, and not away. I thank you all for your cooperation.”

And with that, Dumbledore walked down from his giant chair without saying another word. As soon as he got down from the podium, the mass of students in the room burst into a giant group of talking once again. This time, though, Harry was a part of it.

“I think I’m going to go talk to Dumbledore about this,” he said to Ron and Hermione quickly as he sat up, barely hearable above the rest of the conversations. “So I can see what’s behind this cancellation.”

“I’m coming too!” said Ron, jumping up.

“Me too!” called Hermione.

“Alright,” said Harry quietly. “I have the Invisibility Ring, and Ron can transform into the chameleon. But Hermione...” Harry dug into his packed trunk and grabbed the Invisibility Cloak out, throwing it to her. “You have to wear this.”

She nodded, and the three of them ran past the rest of the students, some of which were already leaving back to their common rooms, wearing dismal and disappointed expressions. Harry, Ron and Hermione forced their way through some of the kids and eventually caught up to Dumbledore who was quickly gliding along the floor down a hall.

“Dumbledore!” yelled Harry, jumping over another short student to get to him.

“Yes?” he asked, turning around and sounding rushed.

“Well... I was- that is...” stumbled Harry. “What’s going on with the trip?”

“Ah yes,” sighed Dumbledore. “Well, you heard my announcement, didn’t you? Something bad came up, and we had to cancel it.”

“The cancellation... it didn’t have anything to do with a house elf named Dobby, did it?” asked Harry, hoping that it wasn’t his fault the trip was off.

“Dobby?” inquired Dumbledore. “No... he had nothing to do with it. Should he?”

“No, not at all,” said Harry, quickly throwing off that subject. “But, what was it exactly that made you call off the trip so suddenly?”

“Harry...” said Dumbledore, sounding almost a little weak. “As much as I trust and adore you, I am afraid that I cannot tell you, and I hope that you will respect that decision.”

“Yes, of course,” said Harry, covering himself up from the cold and feeling a little disappointed that he hadn’t gotten more information.

“Now, I’m afraid I must be off, Harry,” said Dumbledore quickly, turning around. “The two of us have business that we must attend to.”

“We do?” stumbled Harry, turning around and seeing that Ron and Hermione were nowhere to be seen, just as they should be. “I mean- I do?”

“Oh yes,” he continued, not turning around, and putting an arm in the air. “I have a very important meeting to go to, and you have a very important Quidditch match. The new schedule says so.”

“Thanks you for telling me, professor,” said Harry. But, Dumbledore must have not heard him. He didn’t turn around and just kept walking. Then, he said to himself, “But... I think your meeting is more important than my match. Come on guys... let’s follow him.”

“Alright,” said Ron and Hermione together.

Harry grinned and made sure his Animagus Invisibility Ring was on securely. He brought it up a little higher on his finger and then quickly transformed into the gryffin, though no one, not even Ron or Hermione, saw him do it. He slowly walked behind Dumbledore, trying not to breathe, hoping that Ron and Hermione were still with him. As unhurried as Harry thought he was going, he was unused to the Gryffin’s walking speed, which was quite fast and quickly caught up with Dumbledore. He followed him into a classroom and quickly hid in a corner when he shut the door.

“Are you guys in the room?” Harry called out telepathically to Ron and Hermione.

“Yeah,” they both said.

“Right next to you,” added Hermione.

“Alright, follow me.”

Once the three of them were safe and secure, Harry took a look around, to see who else was in the room. He was surprised to see that, along with Dumbledore, every teacher in the school was in there. They were all sitting around a large, circular table, and they all had the same, bored expression on their faces.

“What is it Dumbledore?” asked an annoyed looking Quirrell.

“Yes,” said Flitwick, “some of us were especially looking forward to our chaperoning positions.”

“On the contrary,” interjected Snape, “some of us were not....”

“I will answer all of your questions,” said Dumbledore, sitting down and putting his hands in the air. “First of all... I am sorry to you all as well. I would not have stopped the trip if it was not completely necessary.”

“But what was this thing that happened that made it completely necessary?” demanded Quirrell.

“I think we all know the answer to that,” said Dumbledore, looking around. “Voldemort was spotted around the pyramid, obviously expecting us. Who knows what he had in mind.”

“So you think he would have dared to attack us?” asked Flitwick.

“Even with you there?” said McGonagall.

“I believe,” said Dumbledore, “that Voldemort is desperate enough to attack even me. Though, I fear, that will no longer be an overstatement, as he is becoming more and more powerful by the day.”

For a few moments, no one spoke. There was nothing anyone could really say in response to that.

“I can’t take it anymore!” yelled Professor McGonagall suddenly, slamming her fist on the table.

“What is it Minerva?” asked Dumbledore.

“Oh, Albus,” she sighed. “I should have given this to you long ago.” Amidst the eyes of everyone, she reached into her pocket, and took out the Sorcerer’s Stone. “At first, I wasn’t sure... but now, with all that’s going on, I know that you should be the one to protect it and not me.”

“Minerva...” gasped Dumbledore, in shock of seeing the Stone right there before him on the table. All the other teachers were staring at it as well, practically drooling over it. “How did you... get this?”

“Did you make it?” asked Flitwick, moving in for a closer look.

“Oh, no,” sighed McGonagall. “This is Perenelle Flamel’s Stone.”

“Perenelle Flamel?” inquired Dumbledore, picking up the Stone and examining it. “How did you ever get it from her?”

“Well, I didn’t get it directly from her. I got it from... Harry Potter.”

“Harry Potter!?” exclaimed almost everyone in the room. Harry had to try hard not to say anything, especially ‘here’ or ‘present’.

“How on Earth did he get it?” asked Flitwick.

“In Perenelle’s will,” continued McGonagall, “it said to give the Stone to whoever bothered to show up at the funeral. Harry and his cousin were the only ones who came, so they got it, and then he gave it to me for safekeeping.”

“And now you’re giving it to me...” said Dumbledore, setting it down on the table.

“Yes.”

“Well... I thank you for doing so,” said Dumbledore, putting the Stone into his pocket.. “I can assure you, it is safe with me.” He patted his pocket he put it in and stood up. “Now that you all know what is going on, I will ask you to leave, so we can all get back to business that I’m sure we all have to do.”

With that, the rest of the teachers stood up, gazing transfixedly at Dumbledore’s pocket, wanting to get one last glimpse of the Stone. Once they realized their efforts were in vain, they left quickly and the room was empty, except for Dumbledore and Quirrell.

“I can’t believe Harry Potter had the Sorcerer’s Stone,” whispered Quirrell, walking closer to Dumbledore.

“I know...” said Dumbledore, taking the Stone out of his pocket and examining it again. Quirrell came in even closer to look at it. “Not good at all....”

Why wasn’t that good? Harry thought. He knew that he should have told Dumbledore or McGonagall immediately after he got it, but was it really so bad that he waited?

“Now,” said Quirrell, “please tell me, Dumbledore. What is the real reason you cancelled the trip?” To this, Dumbledore grinned and returned the Sorcerer’s Stone back to his pocket.

“I think that I have found it on my own.”

“What’s he talking about?” asked Ron telepathically.

“Shh!” yelled Hermione. “Don’t talk! Who knows, he may still be able to hear you.”

“Yeah yeah, alright.”

“You mean you’ve found it, without the help?” asked Quirrell, sounding amazed.

“Yes,” said Dumbledore, looking around in a suspicious manner. “But I’m afraid we may have to continue this conversation at a later time and place.”

Quirrell eyed him dubiously, and then an expression of understanding appeared.

“Oh... okay,” he sighed, sounding as if he wanted to hear more. “See you later.”

“Yes, goodbye,” said Dumbledore, walking out of the room quickly, almost immediately followed by Quirrell who took one last look around before exiting. Once the coast was clear, Ron and Harry transformed back, and Hermione took the cloak off.

“Nice going, Ron!” she yelled, jabbing him in the side with her elbow.

“Hey!” he shouted. “What did I do?”

“Dumbledore heard you talking,” said Harry, getting off his arms and knees and standing up. “He must have sensed it somehow.”

“How do you know that’s the reason he left?”

“Oh yeah, it just so happens that everything was going fine until you said something,” said Hermione sarcastically, crossing her arms.

“Oh... yeah.”

“It’s okay, Hermione,” said Harry, opening the door. “We’ll find out more later.”

“I hope so,” she pouted, exiting with him.

“But I still wonder-” said Harry, just before he was cut off by a screaming and running Ak.

“Harry! Ron!” he yelled at them, broom in hand and his Quidditch robes on. “Where the heck have you been!? The game is going to start any second!”

“Oh yeah,” said Harry, looking at his watch and remembering that their match had been moved ahead. “See you later Hermione!”

“I’ll watch you in the stands!” she yelled to them as they sprinted away with Ak.

“Where have you two been?” he asked Ron and Harry again as they were running.

“What house are we playing?” asked Harry, changing the subject.

“Hufflepuff,” said Ak when they arrived at the Gryffindor changing room.

“Oh come on!” said Ron, changing into his robes. “Why’d you have to call us down when we’re playing THEM?”

“They’re not easy enough that we don’t need a Seeker and a Keeper,” said Ak, his arms on his sides.

“That’s debatable,” mumbled Harry, pulling off his socks.

“Anyways,” said Ak, sitting down on a bench. “I’ll tell you guys first since you’re two of the most avid members. The Wizard Duel Club won’t be meeting anymore, at least until the end of the year.”

“What!?” yelled Ron and Harry together, almost falling over.

“It’s a protest against the cancellation of the trip,” said Ak. “It’s the best thing we could think of.”

“But canceling the club won’t bring back the trip!” yelled Ron, almost in tears.

“I’m sorry Ron,” sighed Ak, “but it’s just something we’ve got to do.”

“Heh, it’s too bad you had to cancel it now,” snickered Harry. “Especially since I was really going to cream you the next time we played.”

“Yeah, I’m sure.”

“Well, me and Harry will still play it every day!” said Ron, continuing to change. “Aren’t we Harry?”

“Definitely,” he said, putting the last few finishing touches on his Quidditch robes.

“There we go! All set!”

“Me too!” said Ron quickly after.

“Uh... Ron?” said Harry.

“Yeah?”

“Tell me if I’m wrong, but last time I checked, underwear is supposed to be worn underneath your pants.”

“Not today!”

“Alright, whatever...” said Harry, grabbing his broom.

“Excellent time!” said Ak, walking out with the two of them. “We have three seconds to spare!” He threw open the doors that led to the Quidditch field and the rest of the team was there waiting, all lined up.

“Where have you been?” demanded Mike. “I could have learned another thousand or so Kanji while I was waiting if I’d known you were going to take so long.”

“Yeah,” snapped Akshay. “You guys took longer to get here than downloading a terabyte-size file off of a 3KB bandwidth server with a 28.8KBPS modem!”

“HEY!” yelled Joe suddenly. “You wear your underwear on the outside too! ROCK ON!” He jumped up and gave Ron a high five. Harry just groaned.

“Yeah, you know it’s cool,” said Chris, showing off his backwards pants as well.

“Maybe I should have chosen the losing team at the tryout instead,” moaned Harry to himself as the beginning announcements for the game began.

“And now let’s welcome the Gryffindor team!” yelled Blaise Zabini, though not nearly as loud as the Extreme Quidditch commentator had. In fact, compared to that announcer’s voice, Blaise’s was as soft and quiet as a pillow or a fluffy bunny.

“Well, that’s our cue! Good luck team!” said Harry as he and his teammates flew out onto the field, getting into their positions. Harry soared down to the middle, to shake hands with the Hufflepuff team’s captain.

“Hello again Justin,” said Harry, offering his arm. “Lovely day for a game, isn’t it?”

“Don’t get cocky this time,” grinned Justin, shaking Harry’s hand. “Now our team is better than ever. We’ve even got a new Seeker.”

“Oh? Is he better than you were?”

“Much,” said Justin, releasing Harry’s hand. “He’ll crush you.”

“Heh, who is it?” asked Harry, getting ready to fly away. “Ernie Macmillan?”

“Well... it isn’t not Ernie,” said Justin flying back.

“Ernie!” yelled Harry, nearly falling off of his broom. “Hah! What a joke!”

“Teams!” yelled Madam Hooch suddenly, cutting off Harry and Justin’s ‘conversation’. “Get ready!” With that, she opened the box of balls in front of her and let the Bludgers fly into the air followed by the Snitch that Harry got to glimpse for only a second before it flew out of sight.

“Get set...” she grabbed the Quaffle out of the box, and held it in a throwing position, getting ready to start the match. Joe, Mike, and Akshay looked ready for it, and the Hufflepuff Chasers looked almost intimidated by their ferocious appearance.

“Go!” yelled Blaise, Madam Hooch immediately heaving the Quaffle into the air, starting the match.

“And they’re off!” yelled Blaise as Joe went right for the big red ball, grabbing it before Harry even saw him move. Once the ball was in his possession, the game was practically over. All Harry had to do was sit back and watch his three magnificent Chasers work the Quaffle, and then catch the Snitch when he got the chance.

“And Gryffindor scores!” yelled Blaise, not announcing biasedly. Since Slytherin wasn’t playing, he’d might as well sound happy for Gryffindor. “And then they score again! Twenty to nothing for Gryffindor! Go team!”

Harry grinned to himself. Even if his team wore their underwear on the outside, they were still excellent players. He saw them weaving through the Hufflepuff team as if they were just stationary stones in their path. But, through all of their movement, he saw a Hufflepuff team member moving much the same way. But, none of them were that good.... Harry flew a little closer to try and investigate. He could just barely make out the person’s face and the little gold thing in front of him....

“Wait a minute!” yelled Harry. “That’s the Snitch!” Not wasting any time to think about the situation, Harry blasted forward on his broom, right in the direction of the person and the glint of gold in front of him. Faster and faster Harry went, getting closer to it every second.

“Hah! Thought you’d finally start playing now did you!” yelled the player chasing the Snitch. Harry recognized the voice as belonging to Ernie Macmillan, the team’s new Seeker, but didn’t recognize his features at all.

Ernie’s hair was done in a very unusual way. It was dyed a jet black all over and was down in thick dreadlocks, with a few gold streaks here and there. His face was also completely different: now, his eyes were now longer a light blue but a deep red, and Harry may have imagined it, but it looked as though he had two of his teeth replaced with fangs. The last piece of him Harry could see were his hands, and they looked as they belonged more to some sort of horrible monster than to a boy. His fingernails were long and black, and the deep red veins were practically popping out of his skin. Plus, his skin all over, especially his face and arms, was a light white, but not the wonderful light white that the moon sometimes is, this white was more like the color of puss that would seep out of a popped blister.

“What have you done to yourself?” gasped Harry, keeping one eye on him and the other on the Snitch that was slowly but surely getting further ahead of them.

“None of your business!” yelled Ernie, grinning and lashing out his foot, trying to kick Harry off of his broom. Harry did a quick spin, avoiding it.

“What the heck are you trying to do!?” screamed Harry at him. “Kill me!?”

Ernie just smiled.

“I was only going to put you out of commission, but sure. If you want to die, I’d be more than happy to be the bringer of your demise.”

“You’re a Death Eater now,” said Harry slowly to him, suddenly realizing it. “Aren’t you?”

“Whatever made you think that?” smirked Ernie, going slightly faster. Harry abruptly realized that even though he was on the superior broom, he was having a tough time keeping up with Ernie.

“You look like Neville,” spat Harry. “Only you look more like a vampire, whereas Neville looks like a Japanese cartoon.”

“Ah yes, Neville,” sighed Ernie, doing a quick little magnificent spin. “One of the few non-prefect Death Eaters.”

“Non-prefect?” questioned Harry. “What do you mean?”

“Oh come on, Harry, surely you’ve noticed it. Almost all the prefects in the school are Death Eaters. I mean, sure some of them hide it better than me, but I can’t help but flaunt my new powers. Recruiting prefects is exactly what my master wants, they are the best of the best at the school, and that is what he desires: the best of the best.”

“If he only wanted the best, why did he send a letter to everyone in the school at the beginning of the year?” asked Harry, watching the Snitch quickly zoom out of sight.

“For two reasons,” explained Ernie, making a sharp turn to try and find the Snitch again, “one: he didn’t know who the prefects were at the beginning of the year; and two, my master does not want new recruits to think he discriminates like that. Believe it or not, some prefects wouldn’t join unless their inferior friends were guaranteed the chance to as well. Imagine that? They actually WANT to be around lesser minds....”

“You’re disgusting,” hissed Harry.

“Yes, well, joining has given me that advantage over you on the Quidditch field at least.” Ernie took one hand off of his broom and pointed to his eye. “You see this? These new eyes of mine don’t just look cool, they also serve a purpose. They can home in on and track anything I set them to. All I need to do is describe the Snitch and voila! I can see it even if it was behind a brick wall.”

“You got new eyes?” asked Harry, feeling as though their victory was slowly slipping away.

“Yes,” murmured Ernie, looking around the field. “Sure, the operation was horrible, hurt more than anything in my life. But, my master doesn’t believe in anesthetic, so I had to bear it. But now, it was worth it. I can beat anyone and my master is happy.”

“You’re pathetic,” spat Harry, hearing Blaise announce that their team had scored another ten points. He had obviously missed some other announcements while talking with Ernie as he said the score was now one hundred and forty to nothing. “Doing things just to please Voldemort....”

“Well, it doesn’t matter what you think, Harry. Right now, your life is worth nothing since in the end, you will be destroyed, and I along with my master and his army, shall be victorious. Also, in the short term area, I will win this game.”

“Oh yeah, how so?”

“Because,” he said softly, raising his arm up, “I am holding the Snitch.”

“WHAT!?” yelled Harry, looking at the small, winged, golden ball in Ernie’s grotesque hand.

“Ha ha!” yelled Ernie, throwing the ball at Harry. “Tricked you!” With that, he flew away, at speeds faster than Harry had ever seen before. Just as he was about to try and catch up with him, the fake Snitch that Ernie had thrown exploded in Harry’s face, releasing some sort of itchy powder.

“Oh great, Scratchy Snitches,” groaned Harry, resisting the urge to rub his face. “I have got to tell Fred and George to stop making those.” This was no longer just a Quidditch match, this was war.

“And that’s a penalty to Hufflepuff for using a foreign object during the match!” yelled Blaise. Everyone on the field, except Ernie and Harry, flew over to their foul shot positions. Harry grabbed his wand from out of his pocket, and took aim.

“Stupefy!” he yelled, watching the red beam shoot out and miss Ernie by a millimeter, though surprising him.

“And there’s a penalty to Gryffindor for using magic during the match!” announced Blaise, signaling the teams to get away from the Hufflepuff goals, and fly over to the Gryffindor ones, to make their foul shot there.

“You want to play dirty, eh Harry!?” yelled Ernie from across the field, taking his wand out. “Well then, prepare to get dirty! Terre Monter!” Ernie aimed his wand at the ground below Harry and the greenish-yellow beam hit it there. At first, nothing happened, but then, when Blaise announced another penalty, making the teams once again switch sides, a monstrous beast composed completely of dirt, mud and sand rose from the ground, right in front of Harry.”

It was horrible sight at over sixty feet tall. The monster’s arms and legs were the size of tree trunks and it had no head; only two massive, black eyes on its bulging chest. All over, the dirt was constantly flowing everywhere, as if it were composed of muddy rivers. A horrid, teeth-filled mouth suddenly appeared beneath its eyes, and it gave an unearthly roar, making everyone in the stands cheer, scream, yell and run all at the same time.

The beast took a massive swing at Harry with one of its arms. Harry flew out of the way, just in time to avoid a very grimy grave, and causing a small earthquake when its arm finally did hit the ground.

“I see you’ve gone one step ahead on what we’ve been learning in Herbology!” yelled Harry to Ernie as the monster took another swing at him. Blaise was the only person left in the crowd, and he was announcing penalties left and right, finally making the teams give up, and go over to join either Ernie or Harry in the battle.

“What should we go?” gasped Chris, flying over next to Harry as Blaise announced another penalty to Hufflepuff for not taking a penalty shot. Harry just hoped that everyone that left went to get the professors’ help.

“Don’t worry, Harry,” said Ak just as Harry was about to suggest that they all run away. “I’ll take of earth-boy here, you just make sure that Ernie kid pays for this!”

“Got it!” yelled Harry, spinning his wand around. “Akshay! Joe! Mike! Chris! Ron! Come with me, I’ll need your help to take down the other team.” Just saying those words filled Harry with an exhilaration like no other. He was commanding people into battle... and he liked it.

“Yeah!” they all said together flying up to him.

“Now go!” yelled Ak, taking his wand out. “Mer Monter!” Ak aimed for the ground right in front of the earth monster, who Harry and his two fighters were flying around at the moment.

As soon as the light-blue beam touched the ground, a massive body of water appeared, and out from it, a water monster appeared.

It erupted from the middle of the newly created lake, like a giant wave that just didn't crash down. It quickly took form and looked almost exactly like the earth one did, only this monster was made out of flowing water rather than fluid dirt. The two beasts immediately saw each other, and instantly began fighting it out, leaving the team open to attack.

"Chris! Ron! Joe!" yelled Harry just when they were about to fly around the two monsters. "You guys go around the left side! Mike and Akshay, you take the right! I'll come up the middle!"

"Yes sir!" the five of them called back. Chris, Ron and Joe swerved off to the left, went through the two fighting beasts, and then up the other side, taking the Hufflepuff team by surprise. Simultaneously, Mike and Akshay flew down to the right, then up quickly, right below two unsuspecting Hufflepuff Chasers.

"Ernie!" yelled Harry, seeing that his team was more than a match for the rest of the Hufflepuffs. "You and me... let's go!"

"Very well then," said Ernie, moving in closer, away from his losing team. "Saber!" He held his wand out in front of him, and a black beam rose out of the top, like a sword. Though it was very dark, it seemed lighter than the blackest black Harry could think of.

"What's that spell?" yelled Harry to him, getting ready to unleash an attack.

"It's the Sword Spell," yelled Ernie back. "One of the oldest spells ever created. Traditionally, two wizards would only use that spell during the match, and it would be like a swordfight. But, I'd rather just cut you up. Notice how black mine is... the color of the sword reflects the heart of its user. The darker, the more evil."

Harry just had to try the spell now. He held his wand out in front of him, and summoned the sword from within. To his surprise, a blazing white beam did not come out, but rather a light gray one.

"Ha ha!" laughed Ernie. "So Mr. Harry Potter isn't so perfect after all!"

"Well," yelled Harry to him through gritted teeth, wondering what could make his sword darker, "at least I'll have a perfect record against you, I'll beat you at this, and then I'll beat you at the Quidditch match."

"AAARRRGGG!" yelled Ernie, gripping his wand with both of his hands and holding it over his head as he charged right at Harry, getting ready to bring it down on him with all the strength he had. As he got closer, Harry got in a defensive position, trying to be ready for anything. "TAKE THIS!"

He brought the sword down onto Harry when he was only feet away from him. But, Harry was ready. He held his sword up in a shielding position, and the only thing Ernie hit when he brought it down was Harry's beam.

"You're stronger than I thought..." groaned Ernie, trying to push Harry's sword down with his by pushing harder. As much as Harry knew he had to keep his sword there, he didn't think he could hold it there much longer.

"I can't say the same about you," groaned Harry back, trying to sound more powerful than he actually was. Now, Ernie's strength was really starting to get to him. He could feel his muscles hurting all over and sweat was dripping down his forehead like a faucet. His brain was screaming at him to let go... but he couldn't!

Harry looked over in the direction of the two monsters for help, but Ak was busy assisting his water beast. The pressure being put on him by Ernie was almost overwhelming. Akshay, Mike, Chris, and Joe were all too far away to be heard. No one could help Harry until it was too

late. The pressure wasn't almost overwhelming anymore... now it was overwhelming! Harry had to let go! He gave into his brain's demands and let his arms weaken.

Then, just as Harry was expecting to see Ernie's black sword fall down upon him and cut him into two, the most wonderful thing in the world happened. Out of nowhere, a Bludger hit Ernie right in the face.

The effect of the impact was instantaneous. Ernie mumbled something to himself, his eyes rolled back into his head, and he fell all the way down to the sandy ground, along with his sword. Harry breathed a huge sigh of relief.

"Thank goodness this is still a Quidditch match," he said to himself.

"And that's a penalty to Gryffindor for-"

"Oh will you shut it already Blaise!" yelled Harry to him, flying over to see his team. Blaise became quiet, and he saw that the entire Hufflepuff team had joined their Seeker on the ground. Unfortunately, so did Ron, Akshay, Joe and Mike. Only Chris and Ak were still up, and they looked as though they were in really bad shape. Chris had hex marks all over him, his right arm and leg were moving spastically, and he looked as though he was going to fall off of his broom... which is exactly what he did a second later.

"Ak!" yelled Harry, looking over at the two monsters that were still duking it out, and keeping his eyes peeled for the Snitch so he could end this highly unorthodox match. "How's it going!?"

"Not good!" he yelled back, looking about the same as Chris did. "A few of the Hufflepuffs hit me along with this dirt beast here. Speaking of which, he-"

But, Harry never heard Ak's last line. Just then, his water monster delivered the final blow to its opponent, causing him to stumble around for a second, then beginning to fall over, right where Harry and Ak were.

Suddenly, the thing seemed a lot taller than Harry originally thought it was, seeing as it was about to collapse on top of him. Harry flew as fast as he could out of the way, but it was no use. A second later, he was on the ground, feeling his entire body being crushed all over by the intense weight of the monster. Only his head was sticking out from it.

"Ak!" gasped Harry, trying to reach his wand.

"Yeah..." he moaned back just as the dirt forming the monster stopped flowing and remained motionless... like it should, beginning to fall back to the ground.

"Are you under this thing too?"

"Yeah..." he gasped back again, sounding as if he were in immense pain, which was perfectly understandable. Harry, though, still had work to do. He had to find the Snitch so he could officially end this anarchic match. He scanned the ground around him for any sign of it... and suddenly found it! But, when he saw where it was, Harry groaned to himself and tried to smack his own head.

The Snitch was in Ernie's hand.

It wasn't much longer before a group of professors came down from the school and helped everyone out of their horrible situations. They cleaned up the leftover dirt from the earth monster and banished the water one back to the sea. Madam Pomfrey brought all fourteen players to the Hospital Wing; all the way Blaise was prancing about and singing about Hufflepuff's ten point victory. Apparently, he had taken less of a liking to Gryffindor after Harry told him to shut up. Things only got worse when Professor McGonagall said she was going to take one hundred points away from each house for appalling and expulsion-worthy behavior due to their spur of the moment fight.

But, it wasn't all bad. From their work together, Harry's team now had a magnificent camaraderie and Harry felt as though he was part of a family when around the six of them, especially when he was all bandaged up like a mummy and sharing a small hospital bed with one of his teammates. His relations especially improved with Ak, now reaching the point of almost a Ron, Hermione, or even a Malfoy friendship.

Also, the news of the match spread like wildfire around the school and even though Harry's team lost, they were still crowned as the winners for beating Hufflepuff in the duel that took place. Harry's reputation was back to its usual insanely high standard that it used to be before he lost to Malfoy in the club and Ak in the card game match.

The unusual Quidditch match additionally turned students attention momentarily away from the cancelled field trip, though not for long. They needed something else to distract their minds... and they were going to get it. Thanks to the new schedule, another Dueling Club meeting was scheduled for the end of the week, and everyone in the school, especially Harry, was looking forward to it. Though... he was also concerned. What if someone tried to steal Hermione's Bracelet again? What if Voldemort got it?

"Shouldn't you just leave it in your room?" Harry asked her before they left the common room that day, a few minutes before that meeting was going to start. She rubbed the Bracelet and glared at him.

"No," she said forcefully.

"Why not?"

"Because..." she said, sounding as if she were trying to make something up on the top of their head. "Because... if I leave it in my room, it will be even easier to steal! Someone could just open up my drawer and take it out."

"But, why don't you just put a charm on the drawer, then? Like Harry did?" suggested Ron, polishing up his wand a bit.

"Oh yeah, you saw what happened when Harry put the supposedly good charm on it," retorted Hermione. "Neville took it as easily from it as if it was a normal drawer."

"But... with the proper precautions..."

"Oh my! Look at the time!" yelled Hermione suddenly, looking at her non-existent watch. "We're going to be late if we don't hurry!"

Harry and Ron looked at each other and shrugged.

"Women and their jewelry," whispered Ron to Harry as they stepped out of the room. "Don't come between the two." Harry laughed out loud and Hermione gave him a piercing gaze again. He just cleared his throat, looked up, and they continued walking.

It wasn't much longer before they arrived at the Great Hall, most of the club already there, as usual. But, there wasn't any sign of Professor Flitwick yet.

"Harry!" Cho called to him when he arrived.

"Hello Cho!" said Harry back, stepping away from Ron and Hermione and over to her. "How are you?"

“Fine as long as you’re around,” she said back, tossing her hair and causing a few giggles from the younger students in the crowd. “Anyways, do you know what’s going to happen for this duel?”

“Sure do,” said Harry, feeling proud of himself. This time, Professor Flitwick had visited him when he was in the Hospital Wing, while Harry was trying to figure out the best spell to use to make his bedpan fly out and land on Ernie’s head. They talked about and discussed how the next meeting should be run, and they both agreed that the new guerrilla tactics way of fighting was a huge success. So, Harry just decided to improve on an already good thing.

“Oh really? So, what’s this one going to be like?”

“Well, it was really inspired by our date,” grinned Harry, kicking the floor.

“Oh no! You’re not going to light the floor on fire or bring out dragons, are you?”

“What?” said Harry, a little confused. “No. I was inspired by the end of our date, when I flew you home.”

“Oh... that part of it.”

“Anyways, I thought everyone here would like to experience flight, so we decided to make this a three dimensional guerrilla duel. Instead of only being able to move left and right and forward and backwards, now we’ll all be able to move up and down as well, literally adding a whole new dimension to the game.”

“Sounds like fun!” exclaimed Cho, just as tiny Professor Flitwick appeared in front of the doors, looking almost out of breath.

“Sorry I’m late,” he apologized quickly. “But this trip cancellation has really screwed up everyone’s schedules here.” Once the word ‘trip’ left his mouth, a giant groan escaped from every person in the crowd. “Oh come on! It’s not that bad. All you have to do is wait a few more months and you’ll go anyways. But, now let’s forget all about that pyramid nonsense and have a good dueling match!”

Everyone in the crowd cheered, though the field trip was still on their minds... and would be for quite a while.

“Anyways, your captain and I have quite a good match planned for you today! Come in and let’s get started!” With that, he magically opened the doors to the Great Hall, revealing a completely empty room, just like it was at the last club meeting. Only this time, on one side of the room there were twenty magical skateboards, each a different color.

“For this duel!” announced Flitwick, closing the massive doors when everyone was inside. “We shall once again be practicing our guerrilla tactics, but this time it shall be even more exciting.” He waved an arm over to the side of the room with all of the skateboards. “You see here, over at this wall, there are twenty Soaring Skateboards, each of which might I add is different from every other, and is imported directly from Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes. Each of you will take one and duel on it. If you fall off of your board or if you touch the ground at all, you shall be instantly teleported to me, in a small, clear room where you can observe the rest of the duel but not participate in it.” He pointed a finger to a top corner of the room where there was an almost invisible room hanging above everything.

“Now,” he continued, “if you’d all please, take a board.” He waved his arm in the direction of the assorted skateboards and the group of students ran over to them, picking their favorite. Harry saw that Neville grabbed the one to the far right, a pure black board with two big, red eyes on the top that occasional blinked; and Ernie took the one next to it, one that had flames painted on it that actually moved and roared. They high fived each other and Harry felt almost sick. He chose one that had a picture of white stars on a blue background, and Mike took the one next to his: a white one with black and red Japanese characters all over it. He smiled and began

rubbing the board, drooling all over it. Malfoy went for one with a green, hissing snake on it, but Ron, however, was trampled by the running crowd, and was left with the only one available when everyone else had chosen theirs: a pink one with a picture of a smiling bunny on the top. Harry burst out laughing when he saw Ron get on it.

“Shut up Harry,” he said to him, trying to get his balance, which wasn’t very difficult, seeing as it had no wheels.

“Now, I know there are some of you here that have never used these before,” said Professor Flitwick, putting his hands up. “But, it is very easy, much easier than using a broomstick. All you have to do is first, step on it. Then, to get it started, say ‘up’.”

Everyone got in a line and stepped up onto their boards. Almost in unison, they all yelled the same word.

“UP!”

Immediately, the entire club rose to the air, about a foot off the ground. For some, though, even that was too much, and they fell off.

“Now now!” said Professor Flitwick, helping a few kids back on. “That’s what the safety is for, to help you stay on when you go higher. To set the safety, just say ‘safety’, and then a number from one to ten afterwards, depending on how secure you want to be. Now, when you’d normally use these things, you would use the ten setting, of course. But, it is nearly impossible to knock anyone off at that setting, so we’ll all just use five instead.”

“Safety five!” yelled everyone again, almost immediately after Flitwick had finished talking. Harry felt the board getting tighter on his feet, as if glue had just been poured between his shoes and the top of the board, making it nearly impossible to move his legs. But, Harry found, if he tried hard enough, he could still pull them right off.

“Controlling the boards is even easier,” continued Flitwick. “Once the safety is on, the board makes kind of a small telepathic connection with your brain. All you need to do is think that you want to go left, right, forward, backward, up or down and you will. Go ahead! Try it out!”

In his mind, Harry just thought of going forward, the word, along with the sensation it usually gives. Before he had even completed half of his thought, the board shot forward, at speeds rivaling a broomstick. Harry looked behind him and saw that everyone was now very spread out. Some were up, left, right, and one, Joe, collided with the wall.

“Meh okay!” he announced to the not-really-caring crowd, giving double thumbs up, rubbing his back, and then going forward.

“Alright then!” said Professor Flitwick happily, doing a small spin in the air. “Spread out and I will set up a few obstacles!” He took out his wand, muttered a spell, and out of the tip flew hundreds of multicolored beams, flowing off in every direction. Each beam formed its own random shaped obstacle: some were cylinders, some were walls, others were even shaped like people, but they all were hovering in the air, moving around a bit, like an army of balloons. They covered most of the air, making it like the forest they dueled in last time. The barriers would make good places to hide... maybe even too good.

“Hermione,” said Harry telepathically to her, using his Animagus abilities. “I think you should come a little closer to me... just in case someone tries to steal your Bracelet again. We can stay together for a little while and if nothing happens, we can split up again.”

“Alright,” she said back, not looking at him and flying a bit closer.

“Hey Harry!” Malfoy called to him telepathically. “Is it going to come down to me and you again?”

“You know it,” Harry called back. “Unless Neville or Ernie takes care of you first.”

“Hah! Those two!” laughed Malfoy, maintaining a straight face on his body. “They’re barely up to the point that I was at last year.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Remember those spells I used on you last year, the ones where I grew four arms, made the field an inferno, and made you feel like a hundred dementors were around?”

“Yeah,” shuddered Harry, remembering all too well.

“Well, believe it or not, those are very advanced spells. The stuff that You-Know-Who has taught those two is not even up to that level yet.”

“So you mean, if that’s what you knew last year, now you have an insanely massive arsenal of dark magic spells at your disposal?”

“You’re lucky you have me as a friend and not an enemy,” chuckled Malfoy back.

“And now,” announced Flitwick, breaking up their conversation, “for a final touch!” He muttered another spell and aimed right at the ground. A massive pool of fire overflowed out of the tip of his wand and right onto the floor of the Great Hall, turning it into a giant sea of flames and molten lava. Everyone went another ten feet higher up, just to escape the heat.

“Harry!” Cho yelled to him from not too far away. “I thought you said you weren’t going to light the ground on fire!”

“It’s just a little addition to the playing field, to remind you not to touch the ground,” Professor Flitwick said, flying around it and making sure it was hot enough. “Now, I don’t think any of you will forget!” He flew over to his little safety box in the top corner of the room. “Are you all ready to begin? On your marks... get set... go!”

Harry immediately shot off, aiming for a large, nearby floating wall. He hid behind it, and waited for Hermione. He didn’t have to wait too long for her to show up; she came over and flew right next to him.

“Do you really think someone’s going to try and steal it again?” she asked, holding onto her Bracelet as if it was the most valuable item in the world, which it almost was.

“I don’t know...” said Harry, quickly peering over the side of the wall and watching a small fight going on between Justin and Ginny. She easily beat him with a single spell, and he collapsed to the fiery ground where he was teleported to the safe room with Flitwick.

“Well... what are we going to do?” she asked impatiently.

“Just wait here for a while,” said Harry, looking back.

“Oh come on!” she whined. “I want to go out there and fight!”

“Who are you and what have you down with Hermione?” Harry asked. Hermione was never that assertive.

“I don’t know...” she sighed, flying around a bit. “Just being up here... right in the middle of a meeting... I just want to fight!”

“Well, if nothing happens for a little while, we can go out.”

“Fine...”

“SURPRISE!” yelled Ernie and Neville suddenly, popping out of nowhere in front of Harry and Hermione. They both had wide and evil grins on their faces, and their wands were in attack position. The two of them came up so quickly, Harry had no time to react to their surprise attacks.

“Pagos!” they both yelled together, Neville aiming for Harry and Ernie aiming for Hermione. An icy blue beam erupted from their wands, hitting them both and making Harry feel as though his entire body was no more than a big ice cube.

“What do you want?” yelled Harry, surprised that he could still use his mouth.

“I think we both all know the answer to that,” spat Neville, coming a little closer to Harry and eyeing Hermione’s Bracelet.

“You can’t have it!” Harry yelling, knowing well that he couldn’t do anything to stop them.

“Oh yeah?” said Ernie mockingly, hovering closer to Hermione. “Why not?”

“Because it’s hers!” yelled someone else. The four of them looked up, and saw Malfoy suddenly drop down from above right down onto Ernie and Neville. He did a fancy turn in the air, hitting Neville’s face with his board, and then punching Ernie’s nose with his fist while his body was still horizontal. The two of them spat blood in the air, and Harry saw their eyes roll back into their head as they started falling to the floor.

“Malfoy!” yelled Harry and Hermione together, still frozen. “You saved us... again!”

“Yeah, well, I don’t want You-Know-Who to get the Bracelet any more than you do,” he admitted, performing the counter curse on the two of them. Harry felt the blood start flowing in the body below his head again, and he could move.

“Thanks for saving us, Malfoy,” said Harry, moving around in the air a bit. “But, you do know, we are still in a duel, right?”

“Yeah, I know. But, friendships and beating Voldemort are things that are more important than winning a silly duel. Besides... everyone knows I’m better than you anyway.”

“Yeah right!” yelled Harry. “I beat you last year at the final tournament!”

“But I beat you at the last meeting.”

“Yeah, well I-”

“Enough!” yelled Hermione, putting her hands out and signaling for the two boys to stop bickering. “This is more than just a duel now. Voldemort has a strong presence here, and we have to try and be wary of it. If it wasn’t for you, Malfoy, he could be making the Immortal Potion right now.”

“No he couldn’t,” said Harry. “I still have the Ring!”

“That’s beside the point!” she said, shaking her head and arms. “Let’s just take it slow and make sure that no one else tries to get the Bracelet, okay? Then, when it comes down to the three of us, we’ll know everything’s okay and we can just duel.”

“Sounds more like a way to guarantee that you make it to the end rather than a way to help protect the Bracelet,” snickered Malfoy, flying over Hermione’s head. “Why don’t you just give one of us the Bracelet?”

“No,” hissed Hermione. “Let’s just get back in the game, and see what happens.”

“Fine,” shrugged Harry. He peered over the large wall that they were hiding behind again to see if the coast was clear. It pretty much was; except for Joe who was flying around aimlessly, wand out, and looking for a fight. “The coast is clear... except for underwear on the outside boy.”

“Alright, we’ll go out as a group,” announced Malfoy. “Follow me.”

He quickly hovered to the head of the two and went out slowly, with Harry and Hermione following behind. Not wanting to feel as though he was following behind Malfoy, Harry shot off to the right of him, and yelled at Joe.

“Ha ha!” he yelled at him, taking out his wand. “I see you!”

“Now you don’t!” grinned Joe, tapping himself with his wand and disappearing suddenly. Harry stopped in midair.

“Woah, where’d he go?”

“He turned himself invisible,” said Malfoy, looking around.

“But Invisibility Charms are far too advanced for Second Years!” exclaimed Hermione, looking around nervously.

“Joe!” Harry yelled. “Come on out and fight!”

“Harry!” yelled Hermione, looking as though she were struggling with some sort of invisible force. “Something’s got my Bracelet!”

Harry looked over at her, but he was too late. By the time she was in his sights, the Bracelet had been forced off of her arm, and was zipping around the room, flying at insane speeds.

“Ah!” gasped Hermione. “Hurry and get it!”

Harry didn’t even give time to respond. He shot off right after the Bracelet that was zooming around in midair and giving everything he got to try and catch up to it. Despite the fact that the Bracelet was enchanted, it was quite slow and it wasn’t too much longer before Harry was right behind it. He extended his arms as much as he could, to try and grab it. When he could just feel the cold metal touch the tips of his fingers, he grabbed hold of it, stopping it right where it was.

Harry gripped the bracelet as hard as he could, so much that the encrusted gems on it were digging into his flesh, almost to the point of bleeding. But, it seemed every second, the force pulling on the other side of Bracelet was getting stronger. So, knowing he was fighting a losing battle, Harry did the only thing he could do: let go.

As soon as his fingers let loose of it, the Bracelet flew high into to the air, not being held onto by anything. Harry watched it soar up to its maximum height, then begin to fall.

“Malfoy!” Harry yelled to him, seeing that he was closer to the falling item. “Get the Bracelet!”

Malfoy nodded and flew right at it, trying to estimate about where it would fall to. He stopped when he was just above the fiery ground, arms up and hands open, ready to catch it. The Bracelet fell, faster and faster towards his wide open palms, until suddenly, an instant before he would have caught it, another force flew by and whisked it off to the side.

Malfoy, a little shaken from not catching it, shot after the Bracelet again, not letting it get more than a few feet away from him. He extended his arms out, ready to grab it, when just then, the Bracelet was ‘thrown’ by the invisible force through the air, where it was then caught by another force that was well out of Malfoy’s range that started flying away with it. It was as if there were invisible people all over, playing a very serious game of keep away....

“That’s it!” yelled Harry out loud. “Invisible people! Malfoy!”

“Yeah?” he asked, looking a little tired.

“Do you know any spells that can turn invisible people visible again?”

“Sure do,” Malfoy grinned, understanding. He ripped his wand out of his pocket and aimed it in the general direction of everywhere. “*Pasvoir!*”

A small, almost invisible orb appeared at the tip of his wand that quickly grew to the size of a basketball, then a human, then an elephant, then unimaginable size, almost filling the entire room. It gave off some sort of electric wave as it expanded, bringing everything that used to be invisible back to the real world.

Harry looked around for signs of anyone, and didn’t have to look very hard. Flying all around them was the rest of his Quidditch team, excluding Ak. Joe, Mike, Chris and Akshay were all hovering about, throwing the Bracelet to each other and keeping it well out of the way of Harry or Malfoy. Apparently, they hadn’t yet realized that they were no longer invisible and that Harry and Malfoy could see them perfectly.

Just as Mike received the Bracelet from Joe, Harry shot at him, faster than he ever had before. Mike turned to him, still thinking he was invisible, and merely threw it to Chris, thinking that Harry would just now turn his attention to the other 'invisible' force. But, Harry did not such thing. He just kept going straight for Mike and grabbed him by the neck.

"What do you think you're doing?" spat Harry, lifting him up slightly.

"What do you think we're doing?" grinned Mike, not having a bit of a look of surprise or fear on his face. Harry took a closer look at him, and saw that there was something very different about him... his eyes. He had no pupils, irises, nothing. All there was were two white circles. They were definitely not acting on their own... someone else was controlling them, like last time.

But, Harry had a more pressing issue. He could ponder over what was controlling them later. Right now, he had to get the Bracelet back before one of them took it to Voldemort.

He used a Stupefy spell on Mike and watched him fall fairly quickly to the flaming ground, then be teleported to Flitwick's safety room which now had more than half of the entire club inside it.

Harry looked at the remaining three children, each of whom seemed to have realized that they were no longer invisible. They threw the Bracelet one last time, to Joe, who shot across the field with it, trying to reach an open window in the side of the Great Hall and escape through it. Harry flew off right after him, to try and catch up, but Malfoy got to him first. He grabbed Joe by the leg and used some sort of Dark Spell that turned his entire body to Stone when he touched Joe with his wand. The transformation of flesh to Stone started at Joe's feet, and worked its way up to his head rather slowly.

Just as his arm was about to become a rock, Joe used every ounce of strength he had and threw the Bracelet to Akshay. He shot off after it, getting ready to catch it, but Harry was faster with his wand.

"Accio Bracelet!" he yelled, aiming right for it. The Bracelet immediately changed its direction and began soaring right over to Harry's hand. He caught it in his palm and held onto it tight. This, however, did not stop Akshay's desire to get it. He gave a hiss, showed off his teeth, and flew right at Harry, arms and hands extended out.

Harry just gave a sigh and shot a Stupefy Spell right at Akshay, hitting him long before he would have gotten to Harry. The spell immediately knocked him out and he fell to the floor unconscious.

Now, the only one left was Chris, and he didn't look as though he was in any hurry to try and attack Harry or Malfoy. He just spun around and shot off. But, he wasn't as fast as either of his opponents, and Harry quickly grabbed hold of him. Malfoy arrived soon after.

"Let go of me!" he yelled, trying to shake Harry's magically enhanced grip off.

"Not until you tell us who has possessed you!" yelled Malfoy, looking as though he was trying as hard as he could to resist the urge to use some sort of torture spell on him.

"Fine!" yelled Chris, stopping his shaking. "I'll tell you who it was."

Just then, his face gave a quick, spastic shake and his eyes turned back to normal.

"Well...?" asked Harry, still not letting go.

"Well what?" asked Chris, looking a little dazed.

"Who was controlling you!?" demanded Malfoy, gritting his teeth.

"What?" asked Chris, rubbing his forehead. "What are you talking about?"

"It seems as though whoever was controlling him has just stopped," said Malfoy, looking around, as if trying to see a ghost or something that may have popped out of his head.

"What? Someone was controlling me?"

“Did you recognize the spell used on him?” asked Harry, ignoring Chris and letting go of his leg. Just like last time, whoever had been controlling them removed the spell just before they were about to be told the answer to their question.

“Yeah, but it’s not one any of the kids here would know,” said Malfoy, looking like he was thinking hard. “It’s one that I’ve only heard of... one that You-Know-Who only teaches to his most elite members. It’s an advanced version of the Imperius Curse. It is completely unresistable, that is, once it is cast on you, you can’t get it off, now matter what. In addition to that, it also puts some of your strength into the person you’re controlling. That would explain why they were all able to put an Invisibility Charm on themselves.”

“So, who here could have put it on them?”

“No one we know,” said Malfoy, looking down. “Especially not Neville or Ernie. Not only did the person who put the curse on them know the extremely advanced spell, but they were powerful enough to put it on four people at once.”

“Excuse me!” interjected Chris suddenly. “But, what’s going on here?”

“Oh yeah, that reminds me,” said Harry. “We’re having a duel Chris, and I’m afraid you’ve lost. Stupefy!”

Before Chris even realized what was going to happen, the red beam shot out of Harry’s wand and hit him, sending him to the fiery ground.

“Now let’s find Hermione and give her the Bracelet back,” said Harry. Malfoy nodded, and they started off again in search of her. They checked behind the wall where the three of them were hiding previously and sure enough, she was there, biting her nails and hovering from side to side, pacing in midair.

“Hermione, we’ve got it back!” announced Harry, holding it up to show her. She immediately looked over and her eyes grew wide with a hungry look.

“Gimme that!” she yelled, shooting over to him, ripping the Bracelet out of his hands and quickly putting it back on her arm.

“Ahh,” she said, slipping it back on. “That’s better.”

“Well,” sighed Harry, looking around just to be sure. “I guess you were right, Hermione. It has come down to just the three of us.”

“NOT EXACTLY!” yelled Neville, one again, coming out of nowhere right on top of the three of them. He fell onto Malfoy’s shoulders and squeezed his legs around his neck. He pointed his wand right at Malfoy’s chest from his new position.

“Petrificus Totalus!” he yelled. Malfoy’s body immediately went stiff and he fell to the ground, was gobbled up by the flames, and then sent to the safety room.

“NO!” yelled Harry.

“I know,” sighed Neville sarcastically. “It was a crude spell... but hey, it worked... didn’t it?”

“Stupefy!” yelled Harry, shooting backwards a little and aiming right for Neville. The spell blasted from his wand, but too late; he easily dodged it.

“Hah! You’ll need better than that to defeat me!” yelled Neville, zooming around. “Something like that may have beaten Ernie, but not me. I’m a year ahead of him.”

“Yeah, but you’re still a million years behind me!” yelled Harry, going backwards even more, so he would have time to avoid anything that Neville shot at him.

“Think so?” asked Neville, stroking his wand a bit. “Then take this! Onino Hebi!”

A massive, flaming snake erupted out of Neville’s wand. It gave an ear shattering hiss and showed off it’s mouthful of fangs that was dripping with a light-green venom. It’s eyes were the

only thing besides its teeth that were not on fire, and they were pure black and never blinking. Once they caught sight of Harry, they didn't move.

The snake lashed out at Harry, like some sort of horrible fire whip. Harry backed away just in time to miss it's deadly bite, but the snake did not look any less determined. It merely doubled its length and tried again. Harry was quickly running out of space to back up into. He had to think of something else....

“Tri Oplo!” yelled Harry quickly, having an idea and aiming right for its head. The three spheres hit, and the snake gave a painful hiss. Harry took this opportunity to quickly dash across the field and stop right behind Neville.

“What do you think you're doing!?” he spat as the snake recovered from the hit and turned around to find its victim.

“Let's see how loyal your snake is!” yelled Harry, giving Neville a hard push. The snake immediately turned its attention to this new source of movement and lashed out right at its new target. Harry quickly hovered backwards, out of the way of its attack.

“AAAH!” yelled Neville as the snake tore a piece of his flesh off. Just as the snake reared back, to get ready for another bite, Harry decided to show a little mercy.

“Stupefy!” he yelled, hitting the distracted Neville. As soon as the spell hit, Neville went limp and his snake disappeared. Harry watched him fall all the way down to the ground, then disappear.

“Well,” sighed Harry to himself, “at least now I don't have to fight Malfoy.”

Harry scanned the area for anyone else, to see if anyone was left to fight. Maybe he had just won the duel and he didn't even know it!

“Fucillius!” came a voice from not too far away. Evidently, there were still others on the field. Harry quickly, but stealthily flew over to investigate. He grabbed onto a pear-shaped obstacle and peered over it. There, he saw Hermione engaged in a duel with not one, not two, but three others! It was her against Ak, Tci and Aylar, and she didn't look as though she was going to win.

“Stupefy!” yelled Aylar, delivering the final blow. Hermione collapsed and fell to the ground. But, instead of starting to fight each other as Harry would have expected them to, the three of them just hovered there, as if waiting for someone else to come along. What was going on? Harry decided not to question it right now and to just take advantage of the opportunity of all three of them being sitting ducks.

“Siragus!” he yelled, creeping up over the top of the obstacle and aiming right for the middle of the three. Before any of them realized what was going on, there was a massive explosion in midair, right where Harry had aimed for. When the dust cleared soon after, Harry saw that Aylar and Ak were gone. Only Tci was left, and he looked in bad shape.

“What were you doing?” Harry asked him as he flew down. “You're not supposed to have teams in this. Why didn't the three of you fight each other after you beat Hermione?”

Tci just gave him a dazed look. Blood was all over his face, as was ash and dust. Evidently, the explosion had hit him directly since he was in the middle of the three, and done the most damage to him.

“We can't... do... each other...” he gasped, looking as though he might fall any second, which is exactly what he did an instant later.

“Oh well,” Harry shrugged to himself. He remembered that he, Malfoy, and Hermione had kind of been a team before, and that maybe Aylar, Tci, and Ak were doing the same. They were, after all, three of the best fighters there. But, Harry, Hermione and Malfoy had promised to fight each other when everyone else had been defeated....

Suddenly, Harry felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around and saw a grinning Ak behind him, with his wand pointing directly at Harry's chest. Before he had time to react, Ak used a Stupefy on him and Harry's world turned black all around him as he fell down towards the fiery ground.

For once, neither himself or Malfoy had won the duel.

Chapter 17- The Geb Pyramid

A while after the duel was finally over, Harry learned from talking with Ak that his Siragus Spell had knocked out Tci and Aylar, but not him. He only got a little ash from it, and he hid behind an obstacle, waiting for just the right time to pop out and surprise Harry. Since there were no more duelers left after him, Ak had won.

Harry also learned that during the duel, students from all over the school had been watching them through clear glass enchanted to look like the Great Hall's walls. Almost everyone, including every professor, had come down to watch the match, to try and lift up their spirit's a little bit more from the trip's cancellation, which everyone was slowly but surely getting over.

Despite all of this new knowledge Harry gained, he still had no clue who had been controlling the four boys during the match. Harry dared not talk about it with anyone else except for Malfoy, Hermione, and Ron. The fewer people that knew about the fact that he and Hermione both had ingredients to the Immortal potion on their arm, the better. Harry was almost tempted to tell Ak, but their friendship was still in the developmental stage, and trust was still not a set thing. Harry decided against it, and it was probably because he only discussed it with such a small amount of people that he didn't find out anything new.

The weeks went by quickly, and then the weeks soon turned into months. Harry was surprised at how fast school seemed to be going by, especially since nothing exciting was going on. There were not more Gryffindor Quidditch matches planned until the end of the year since they had lost their previous one. Though, since Slytherin slaughtered both Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff in their matches, it was confirmed that Gryffindor would be in the finals, though only by a little. Also, there were no more Dueling Club meetings, not until the final one at the end of the year in front of everyone.

There were no more Wizard Duel meetings either. Despite the fact that Dumbledore was not going to make the trip's date any earlier, Ak didn't budge on his decision. Everyone was going crazy, wanting to have a good tournament. This seemed to lower most of the student's want to play it every day, in fact, Harry believed that the only two people in the school that played every day were himself and Ron, though Ak yelled at them each time, to try and get them to stick with him.

Prefect meetings were just the absolute lowest point of Harry's day. The rest of them were almost as boring and useless as the first one. They did nothing expect talk about possible prefects for next year from the fourth years, and changing the school dinner menu. Harry suspected that they were no more than recruiting grounds for new Death Eaters. Each meeting, it seemed as though more and more still had their letters with them, and they showed no sign of throwing them out.

In fact, the only thing somewhat exciting that happened (besides a most peculiar incident in Transfiguration where everyone spontaneously grew an extra arm) was Harry's next date with Cho. This time, he wanted to have a violent-free and Voldemort-free excursion, so he took the liberty of planning it. He made reservations at a place called the Collateral Café in Hogsmeade, a place where you didn't have to pay for your meal if you left quickly enough, but you had to give the waiter something of yours before you sat down. So, if you didn't pay, the restaurant would be able to keep the thing you gave them.

It was very interesting to see some of the wonderful items that the restaurant had collected over the years that were hung on the wall, and seeing people all over eating, some without a shoe, a shirt, or some that even gave away their hairpieces. At first, the waiter wanted Harry's Ring, but the thought of giving it away was more than Harry could bare, so he gave him his glasses instead. It was a wonderful meal there, especially since Wormtail didn't show up at the end, trying to cut off Harry's fingers.

Despite this one evening of fun, the rest of the next few months was downright boring, and Harry, along with the rest of the school, was ecstatic when the day finally came that they would all leave for their field trip to the Egyptian Pyramid.

Once again, Harry woke up before anyone else in his room and sprinted downstairs excitedly with his packed trunk. All the way down to the Great Hall, Harry kept one eye open for Dobby, to try and not be surprised by him if he attempted to stop him from going on the trip again. But, Dobby must have given up on that effort, for Harry never saw so much as a sock of him by the time he finally got to the biggest single room in Hogwarts.

Harry quickly sat down at the Gryffindor table, his legs bouncing anxiously. There were about ten other students down there now, each waiting for the same thing: Dumbledore's announcement that the trip was on.

As the Hall began filling up at quite an alarming rate, almost ten or twenty more students every minute now, Harry could feel the tension in the room building, and his excitement growing. If Dumbledore dared to cancel this trip, he would surely not live long enough to regret it.

"Hey Harry," yawned Ron when he finally arrived down, carrying his small bag. "You're up early."

"Too excited to sleep."

"Enh," grunted Ron, sitting down. "I don't know what everyone's so excited about this trip for. I went to the Egyptian Pyramids before, and you've seen one you've seen them all."

"Yes, but you're the only one here that's seen one," yawned Harry back.

It wasn't too much longer before Hermione and Malfoy arrived, along with the rest of the second years and up. Harry waved to the sleepy-looking Malfoy, wishing that he could join them at the Gryffindor table.

"Good morning students!" called Dumbledore in far too cheery of a voice for the ungodly hour that they were all up. "Are you all ready to go?"

"Yeah," grunted, yawned, and belched the mass of students.

"Well, before we leave, I have an announcement," continued Dumbledore, putting his hands down. "Just one small one... I'm afraid... the trip has been cancelled."

No one said anything. They just froze there, mouths opened wide and eyes glazed over. The hall was quieter than the most silent silence in the world.

"Just kidding!" laughed Dumbledore, giving a weak cough.

"That's not funny!" yelled most of the students back, recovering from their state of almost-fainting.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” apologized Dumbledore. “But, I couldn’t resist. You all need to learn how to take a joke.

“Anyways, I do have an actual announcement. We will be leaving for the Geb Pyramid momentarily. The Hogwarts Express will be taking us there and I need all of the seventh year prefects to escort their house’s third years out of the main door, and to the train, and all the sixth year prefects to escort their house’s second years out of the main door, and to the train. I would also like it if they would remain with their students on the Express so that they can keep an eye on them, and they do not fall out of the window.”

“How can they fall out of the windows?” asked Ron.

“Well, we can’t cross water on a train, now can we?” said Hermione.

“Yeah, but what does that have to do with anything?”

“Oh come on, Ron,” said Harry, realizing what must happen. “We’re going to fly there, aren’t we, Hermione?”

“Well yeah.”

“Heh,” laughed Ron quickly. “I could just picture Joe falling out of it.”

“And now,” announced Dumbledore, putting his hands together and sounding as though he was wrapping up. “To the train!”

“Yay!” yelled all of the students as they all jumped up and ran out of the door, causing some major blockage and crowding.

“Aren’t you going to help your second years?” Hermione asked Harry as they waited patiently to leave. They didn’t want to be any part in that massive jumble.

“Nah, they can figure it out for themselves.”

Harry looked behind him and saw that they crowding was quickly clearing up. The three of them sat up and walked out of the door, following the massive group to the main Hogwarts door. There, right in front of them was the Hogwarts Express, just as it usually looked, except without the tracks beneath it. How could that thing possibly fly?

Harry decided to not question it, just to accept it, and get on that train. He climbed aboard and sat down with Ron and Hermione in their usual compartment.

“Come on, Harry,” nagged Hermione. “Live up to the prefect name! Check on your little ones!”

“No.”

“Come on...”

“No.”

“Come on...”

“No!”

“Come on... please?”

“Fine!” sighed Harry angrily, standing up. “I’ll see them!”

“Thank you.”

Harry walked out of their compartment and down the train’s hall, looking through every open door, to see where they were sitting. He didn’t have to look for long. All five of them were in one compartment.

“Go go go!” they were all chanting. Harry peeked inside and saw that Joe had already managed to put half of himself through the window that was barely opened. His head and torso were outside and his wriggling legs were still in.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Harry demanded, stepping inside.

“Seeing how far he can go through,” said Akshay.

“It’s only been a few seconds and he’s already halfway through,” announce Mike.

“Yeehaw!” yelled Chris. “Maybe he’ll fall out in the ocean if we’re lucky!”

“Meh will send you a postcard!” barked Joe from outside.

“Don’t you think that’s a little... stupid?” asked Harry.

“Don’t worry,” said Aylar, looking like he was enjoying this. “I’ll protect him.”

“Fine,” said Harry, leaving as Mike was giggling and drawing Kanji on Joe’s pants. Harry just gave a sigh and closed the compartment door, hearing more chants. He looked around, to try and find his way back, when he saw a most unusual compartment door. Instead of being wood like all the others, this one was a light gold and had a plaque on it that read ‘Private’.

Harry, knowing that curiosity had not killed that cat but rather an overfilled litter box, decided to investigate a bit more. He crept over the door and put his ear up to it, to see if he could hear anything.

Then, just as he thought he could hear something through the door, it swung open and Harry stumbled onto the ground.

“Harry!” said the person who had opened the door. Harry looked up quickly from his point on the ground and saw Dumbledore looming above him. “What are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be in a compartment?”

“Um...” stuttered Harry, trying to think of something quick. “I uh... had... a question for you....”

“Well?” asked Dumbledore, kind of impatiently.

“Well... um... won’t Muggles see this thing flying in the sky?” he asked. Harry was impressed that he came up with a decently good question right there on the spot.

“That was not too difficult of a problem to solve,” said Dumbledore, closing the compartment door behind him to Harry couldn’t see in. “We merely enchanted it to look like a flock of birds flying above to anyone that caught a glimpse of it.”

“But why go through all that trouble to disguise the train?” asked Harry, standing up and feeling more confident with his questioning now. “Couldn’t you just Apparate all of there or something?”

“Oh yes, we very well could have Apparated you all, or even used Floo Powder,” said Dumbledore. “But, Harry, life is more about the journey than the actual destination. Life isn’t about arriving at death, but enjoying the paths you take and its many twists and turns. So, I say enjoy the clouds floating by and the birds singing as we fly along. You’ll miss all that when you are able to Apparate.”

“I see,” said Harry, not really getting it. “Thank you, professor.”

“Anytime,” said Dumbledore. “And Harry... one last thing.”

“What is it?”

“Stay away from this door,” he grinned.

“Of course,” bowed Harry as Dumbledore quickly slipped back into his private compartment. Once the door was completely shut, Harry ran back to his corridor, wanting to get this trip underway.

“Oh! Welcome back, Harry!” said Ron when he opened the door. To his surprise, there were now three more people in the tiny room, Malfoy, Ginny, and Cho.

“What are you three doing in here?” asked Harry, taking the only available seat.

“What, are we not welcome?” asked Malfoy.

“No, it’s just that, usually on me, Ron and Hermione sit here.”

“Well, I don’t want to spend any more time with those two bumbling idiots Crabbe and Goyle than I have to,” grunted Malfoy.

“And I missed my Dracie-Poo!” squeaked Ginny, giving Malfoy a kiss. Their relationship was much more bearable now, and Harry found that he didn’t cringe at all.

“Me too,” said Cho. “Only… Harry instead.”

“Great,” said Harry. “Now we have all three couples in one room.”

Just then, the train gave a lurch forward, and started moving. Very slowly at first, then faster and faster, much more quick than its usual speed. Faster and faster it went, until they were only a few hundred feet from the Forbidden Forest. Then, just when the train was about to collide with the trees, it magically jumped up into the air and flew high above them, right alongside the clouds.

Dumbledore had been right. It was a very enjoyable trip on the train. The six of them laughed and talked together, forgetting all about Hogwarts and schoolwork and everything bad in their life. They were having such a good time, that none of them wanted to get off the train what felt like only a minute later (but was actually around two hours) that they arrived.

“Come on!” announced Dumbledore, walking up and down the halls. “We’re there, it’s time to get off!”

“I guess I’d better go check on my little second years,” said Harry, standing up. “I’ll meet you all outside.”

With that, he left the compartment and sought after the five terrors. He opened their compartment, and inside were five laughing children, with Joe in the middle, covered in multicolored characters.

“Meh fell out three times!” he squealed, putting up four fingers and looking like he could use a week in the Hospital Wing.

“Um… good for you,” said Harry, rolling his eyes. “Come on. It’s time to leave.”

After a few whines of disagreement, Harry convinced the five of them to come out. They, along with the rest of the passengers on the train, exited quickly and arrived outside.

The first difference Harry noticed about this new setting was the heat. He thought that a bright Quidditch match day was hot, but that was nothing compared to this. Harry’s head was already covered in sweat. He immediately took off his heavy, black robe, along with his tie. Harry had to resist the urge to remove his final shirt, which was wet all over.

The sun was also much more intense here. It hit the sand, reflecting right into Harry’s eyes, practically blinding him. All around, everything was lighter, almost white from the powerful rays. Harry tapped his glasses with his wand and they magically turned darker, keeping out some of the sun.

“Another wonderful Egyptian day,” commented Ron who just got off the train, holding his hand above his eyes.

“Ah yes, nice and warm,” said Malfoy, squinting and coming out with his arm around Ginny’s neck. He turned to her. “My my Ginny, you look awfully hot in that robe… may I take it off for you?”

“I’m still getting used to you, Malfoy,” said Ron. “Don’t blow it.”

“Attention students!” announced Dumbledore, getting ahead of the massive group of students. He was floating in the air a little, so that everyone could see him. “Follow me to the Geb Pyramid!”

Harry looked ahead for the first time, and saw before him one of the largest structures he had ever seen. It was at least twice as large as Weasley’s Wizard Wheezes Inc., and it was made entirely out of massive, stone bricks.

“Please, follow me inside and you will all be divided up into groups and be allowed to explore the pyramid freely,” he continued, trying to get the attention of over four hundred sweaty and anxious kids.

He waved his arm, signaling to them to follow. Harry got back into his group of six, and they, along with the hundreds of others treaded across the hot desert sand, removing more and more articles of clothing as they went along. Harry looked around as they moved forward and saw that there was nothing but sand as far as the eye could see. Except for the train, the mass of students, and the pyramid, sand was all that there was.

The group walked up closer to the pyramid, so much that Harry saw that the bricks that were making it up were even bigger than Hagrid, almost five times his size. They walked all the way up to a single, massive stone, the only one that was going vertical instead of horizontal.

“Now,” said Dumbledore when the group had caught up to him. “This block here is exactly like Platform 9 ¾. All you need to do is walk right through it to get inside.”

Dumbledore immediately stepped through the giant Stone, as if it were a normal door, melting right through it like water. When it appeared as though he did it without being hurt at all, the rest of the students traveled through as well. Even though Harry was used to things like that by now, it was still extremely eerie, seeing dozens of kids flow through the solid brick, disappearing onto the other side. Harry soon joined them on the other side as well, walking through the solid brick as if it were air.

What was on the other side surprised Harry so much, he stopped in his tracks. Instead of appearing in a musty and dark tunnel inside the pyramid, he found himself in the middle of a very nice room, furnished almost exactly like a very large version of a hotel lobby, except where there would be benches and chairs, there were beds and cots instead. Next to a small window in the wall (which had a small office behind it) there was a single, ordinary looking door that read ‘To The Inside of the Pyramid’. A man appeared in the window next to the door.

“Why hello Dumbledore!” he said in a cheery voice. He was dressed like a hotel bellboy and sounded like one too. “We’ve been expecting you.”

“Hello Mark,” said Dumbledore back, stepping through a few children that were gazing at the marvelous paintings on the walls to get to him. “Is your guide ready to tell us a little bit about this place?”

“He most certainly is,” said Mark, spinning around in his chair. “Hey Bob! The group’s here!” He spun back to face Dumbledore and the group. “Bob will be with you shortly.”

“How is he going to get to us?” asked Hermione quietly. “There’s no doors or anything coming out of the office.”

Hermione’s question was immediately answered as Bob all of a sudden popped out of the wall next to the window. Bob was evidently not a human, but a ghost. He was dressed very nicely, all done up in a suit and tie. He also had no hair at all, unless you counted the two little translucent puffs above his ears.

“Why hello everyone!” he said loudly, clapping his hands together and flying around the room. “I’m so happy you could come to visit the Geb Pyramid, it’s really the best one in all of Egypt; that’s why I’ve chosen to live here for the past two thousand and six years. I know more about this place than the people who built it!”

“Well then, why don’t you give us a little introduction to it?” suggested Dumbledore.

“That sounds like a splendid idea,” said Bob, bringing a chair up with him so he could sit down in it. “Well, first of all, no one knows exactly when the Geb Pyramid was built. We do, however, know how and why it was built. It was originally constructed by Ancient Egyptian

Wizards who, using some of their primitive magic, floated these massive blocks of Stone that make up this pyramid up on ramps.

“Now, why it was constructed is a completely different story. The Egyptians wanted a place where heroes could go to test their speed, courage, intelligence and strength. And, once they passed the test, could be immortalized for all eternity. This pyramid is that place.

“However, so many people tried their luck at this place, the death toll rose to unbelievable numbers. The Pharaoh ordered his best wizards to hide this pyramid from view, and erase it from ever existing. But, using modern magical techniques, we have been able to break those primitive charms and allow all wizards and witches to enjoy its splendor.

“Now, if you all would please divide up into groups of five, you will be assigned a guide, and we can get on our way taking in some of that splendor.”

The somewhat organized group now broke up into chaos.

“Will you be in my group?”

“You want to be in my group?”

“Hey you! You’re in my group!”

That was all that could be heard for a while. But, Harry had to join in it, to figure out who was going to be with him.

“Let’s see... me, Hermione, Ron, Malfoy, Ginny, and Cho,” said Harry. “Oh no! That’s six!”

“But, I don’t see Cho anywhere,” said Ron, looking around.

“What? She was here just a minute ago.”

Harry looked around too, but she was nowhere in sight.

“She probably went off with some of her other friends,” said Malfoy.

“But-”

“Let her go,” said Hermione. “You two need a little time apart.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right. She should spend some time with her other friends.”

“Well, now we’re a group of five!” announced Malfoy, putting his arm around Ginny again.

“Um... no you’re not,” said Bob the ghost who suddenly flew over them.

“No, we are,” said Ginny. “Me, Draco, Harry, Hermione and Ron. That’s five!”

“Yes, but I’m afraid we have a strict rule here at the Geb Pyramid School Tours,” said Bob apologetically. “You can’t have two people from the same family in the same group.”

“What? Why not?” demanded Hermione.

“Because if something were to happen to your group, we want the family to still have one child, now don’t we,” said Bob, glaring at her. “One of you two Weasleys has got to go.”

“How do you know Ron’s last name?” asked Harry.

“The Weasleys visited us three Summers ago,” said Bob lazily. “On their Egyptian tour and I never forget a face.”

“Fine fine,” said Ginny, putting her hands up, I’ll leave.”

“No Ginny!” begged Malfoy. “Please stay!”

“Come on, Malfoy,” she said. “Harry and Cho are spending some time apart, maybe we should have a few hours to ourselves.”

“But those few hours are like knives in my heart,” said Malfoy clutching his chest.

“Oh come on, you,” she giggled. “I haven’t spent much time with my other friends lately. I’ll meet you back here at night.”

“Oh fine... be gone if you must,” said Malfoy sadly and softly, falling to his knees.

Ginny just a gave a small laugh and started working her way through the crowd.

“Now we need another person,” said Ron, looking around.

“Hey Harry!” called Ak, stepping into their little assembly. “You think I could join you? Almost everyone else’s group is full.”

“Sure,” said Harry. “We needed another person anyways.”

“Thanks,” said Ak, sounding almost out of breath.

“Does everyone have a group now?” asked Dumbledore, flying a bit above everyone, just to make sure.

“Yes!” yelled everyone in the giant crowd.

“Excellent. Now, you will all be given a guide. Either one of your professors or one of the special Geb Pyramid guides will arrive at your group shortly. Please treat your guide with respect... especially if he or she is your professor.”

“I hope we don’t get Snape,” said Ron.

“I hope we don’t get Trelawney,” sighed Harry

The five of them waited... and waited... and waited... but no guide came to them. Harry saw other groups receive their teachers and leaders, but no one came to their group of five. Just when Harry thought they were going to have no one, Dumbledore came over to them.

“Hello professor!” said Harry to him. “Are you going to be our guide?”

“What? Oh, no. No, I’m sorry, Harry,” he said to them. “I’m afraid that your group will not have a guide.”

“What!?” yelled the five of them together.

“But... we need a guide!” yelled Hermione. “How else will we get the most from this trip? Who will tell us what the carvings mean? Who will keep us away from the cursed rooms? What will happen if we get hurt?”

“I am very sorry,” apologized Dumbledore. “But, I must have miscounted or something and left one too many professors at Hogwarts to watch over the first years.”

“But... who will guide us?”

“Well... Ron knows a lot about this place,” suggested Dumbledore. “Let him lead you along!”

“Well... I did take the tour before,” said Ron, turning a little red. “I suppose I could show you all around.”

“That’s the spirit,” said Dumbledore, hitting him on the back. “You’ll be fine!”

With that, he walked back to the group his was guiding.

“Can you really show us around the pyramid?” asked Hermione, looking scared that she may not get the most out of this trip.

“Probably not...” muttered Ron.

“Alright students!” announced Dumbledore, hovering up a bit. “You are all free to go now. Be sure to stay with your guides and don’t trail too far from them, you don’t want to end up taking the Hero’s Test now do you? Lastly, remember to return to this room by ten at night. This is where you will all sleep tonight... I trust you all brought sleeping bags.”

“Yes!”

“No...”

“Do rocks count?”

“Excellent!” continued Dumbledore, not paying attention to any negative answers.
“Now... go!”

There was a mad rush for the door as all the groups ran directly for it. Harry and the rest of his group, though, decided to wait a minute, until everyone else was gone. That didn’t take very long; in a matter of seconds, the entire room was cleared.

“Shall we?” asked Harry, waving an arm towards the door.

“Yes we shall,” said Malfoy, running up to it, throwing it open, and running through.

“Wait up for us!” yelled Harry, running after him along with the rest of his group. He burst through the door, and bumped right into Malfoy who was crawling along the extremely narrow corridor, right behind the rest of the hundreds of students.

“Oh man,” grunted Harry, feeling a little claustrophobic. “Why are these hallways so narrow?”

“The builders didn’t see a reason to make them wider,” said Ron who was last in line of the five of hem. “They expected to have only one hero going through at a time... this entire place is like an anthill.”

They crept along the corridor, not too far behind the rest of the students. Right now, there wasn’t much to see, just rocks on the walls. But, after a few minutes of walking slowly, they came to a fork in the path. All of the students were going down the right path, and the left one was blocked off by a velvet rope.

“So... which way do we go?” asked Malfoy when they got to the split.

“Isn’t it obvious?” said Hermione. “The path that’s not blocked off obviously.”

“Oh come on!” yelled Malfoy, leaning on the rope. “Where’s your sense of adventure?”

“It’s down the path that everyone else is going,” she said, trying to creep by Harry and Malfoy who were in front of her.

“Don’t you want to learn everything you can about this place?”

“Well, yeah and everything I want to know is down this way.”

“Ron?” asked Malfoy. It was weird hearing him not referring to him as ‘Weasley’.

“You’ve been down that path before. Anything down there you can’t read in a book?”

“No, not really.”

“Well then!” grinned Malfoy. “I’m sold!” He touched the rope with his wand and it disappeared. “Let’s go!” He started walking down the path less taken, but no one followed him.

“Come on!” he beckoned when he was about twenty feet down the dark corridor.

“Let me through!” said Ak, pushing his way past Harry. “I’m going down that way! Wait for me, Malfoy!” He ran down the corridor with him, disappearing into the dark tunnel. Harry shrugged his shoulders and walked down it too, quickly followed by Ron.

“You know, we could get in trouble for this!” yelled Hermione down to them.

“Not if anyone sees us,” said Harry back, following the barely visible outline of Malfoy and Ak. He heard Hermione sigh and start walking along with them.

They marched down the hall, with the lights getting dimmer and dimmer with every step. Finally, they were in complete darkness, so much that it didn’t matter if Harry closed his eyes or not, he could still see same.

“Lumos!” he yelled, hoping that the stick he was holding onto was his wand. The usual bright beam shot out of the tip, giving Harry a thin beam with which to find his way to move along. Harry saw Malfoy and Ak do the same, and heard Ron too. It was creepy to see three rays of light moving along the gloomy and pitch black hallway.

“Oh man!” Harry suddenly heard Malfoy yell. “You guys have got to see this!”

“What!?” yelled Harry, quickening his pace. “What is it?”

“Just come over here and I’ll show you!”

Harry ran ahead, trying to not run into the owners of the two beams in front of him. He quickly reached Malfoy and Ak.

“What? What did you find?” Harry asked, catching his breath.

“Look at this cool artifact!” said Malfoy, shining his beam on some sort of golden object. But, the beam was not even close to being big enough to show the entire thing. They needed more light.

“Malfoy,” said Harry, “do you know any spells that can give us more light?”

Even through the darkness, Harry could sense that he grinned.

“Harry... what do you think?”

“Well, use it!”

“Alright... Solelum Lumos!” From the tip of his wand, a flood of light erupted out, as if the entire sun had just appeared right in front of them. The entire room was even brighter than the outside desert, and Harry had to intensify the darkness of his glasses just to bring his vision to normal brightness.

But, what was revealed to them was worth all of the brightness and any other pain that they had ever experienced in their lives. As high up as Harry could see, there was nothing but golden artifacts. It was a gigantic pile of golden objects, each encrusted with gems, rubies, emeralds, everything that shined. Harry felt his jaw hit the floor and then get wet in his puddle of drool.

“Oh... my... god....” gasped Ak and Ron together, eyeing the insanely huge pile. Before them was more money than in the entire world.

“So, Hermione,” said Malfoy, turning around. “Was it worth it to break the rules to see this treasure?.... Hermione? Hey, where is Granger?”

“What?” said Harry, quickly turning his attention away from the unimaginable pile of wealth.

“She’s not here,” said Malfoy.

Harry looked behind him, and saw Ak, Ron and Malfoy, but there was no sign of Hermione. She was nowhere to be seen.

Hermione was gone.

Chapter 18- The Hero’s Tests

“HERMIONE!” yelled Harry and Ron together, quickly followed by Ak and Malfoy who tore their eyes away from the pile of wealth. Harry ran up and down the corridor, yelling her name, but he couldn’t find her.

“Where is she?” demanded Ron, looking frantically all over.

“HERMIONE!” yelled Harry at the top of his lungs one last time. But, once again, she did not show up. The only thing that answered his call was his echo.

“How could she have left?” asked Ak, touching the stones all over, checking for secret passages.

“She was right behind me the entire time,” said Ron, joining Ak.

“Malfoy, did you see her at all?” asked Harry, taking one final look down the hall. Malfoy didn’t answer him. “Malfoy, did you?”

Harry turned around, and had to resist screaming in surprise. Where Malfoy was only a few seconds earlier, there was now no one. Harry could hear his heart beating frantically in his chest. Where did they go?

“Ron...” asked Harry impishly. “Malfoy’s gone now too...”

There was no response.

Harry turned around, dreading what he was going to see. Sure enough, there was no Ron behind him, only Ak.

“Ak! Where’s Ron and Malfoy!” asked Harry worriedly, now almost on the verge of tears. Fear was overwhelming him to the point of absolute terror.

“I don’t know,” whimpered Ak, darting his eyes up and down the hall. “Ron was right next to me a second ago, then he just... disappeared.”

“I don’t like this, Ak,” said Harry quietly, not letting him leave his sight, not wanting him to disappear as well. “How could they all just disappear?”

“Maybe this treasure is cursed or something,” suggested Ak, backing away slowly from the pile of gold that they had all sprinted towards only moments ago. But, that was back when they all were here.

“Alright, I have an idea,” said Ak, trying to keep his voice calm. “I’m going to go back to the main group and tell the teachers what happened. Maybe they can help.”

“No!” yelled Harry. “We’ll get expelled for taking the wrong path!”

“It’s better than being killed or trapped in this pyramid forever,” said Ak.

“I supposed you’re right... but hurry back!”

“I will!” said Ak, beginning to run down the dark corridor.

“Wait!” yelled Harry to him, reconsidering being alone. “Ak, wait!”

It was too late. Ak was already well out of sight, far into the deep darkness on the other side of the hall.

Harry was all alone.

It’s very interesting, how when you’re alone, you pay much more attention to the small noises and movements all around you. The dripping of the water on the walls, from the moist stones was like gongs in Harry’s ears, and the occasional movement of the golden objects made a massive shadow appear on the wall, making Harry draw out his wand and coil back in fear.

Worst of all, it seemed as though the light that Malfoy had summoned was slowly going out.

“Wait a minute!” said Harry to himself. “The light is getting dimmer!” It was as if a cloud was passing over the sun, a very dark and thick cloud. What used to be brighter than the desert outside was now only as bright as a cave, and getting darker with every second.

Harry slowly backed away from the darkening room, but found himself only entering the pitch black corridor from which he came. Only a few seconds later, Harry was engulfed by the darkness. He was drowning in a pool of night, it was devouring him all around.

Harry’s heart was beating so fast and hard he thought it would explode out of his chest. He could feel its beats echo all the way up to his head, making the sweat in his hair and on his forehead throb, and drip down. Any second now, Harry expected some sort of hellish beat to come up from behind and tear him to pieces.

Just then, Harry heard a noise and closed his eyes, preparing for some sort of sharp and pointy impact. But, instead, Harry fell... into the floor! Some sort of trap door opened up below him and Harry fell right through it.

It was like some sort of horrible slide, still pitch black but hard and metallic all around, twisting and turning in every possible direction. Most of the stones weren't smoothed out, and they tore through Harry's light shirt that he had on, giving him cuts and lacerations all over, adding a bit of blood color to the stones.

"OUCH!" yelled Harry. The slide part of the trip had ended and he landed, head first, onto another stony ground. Harry rubbed his head and saw that he was now on some sort of stone bridge, crossing over a massive pit that filled up the entire floor of the small room, a pit that appeared to have no bottom.

"Harry!" came a familiar voice. He looked on the other side of the bridge, and right there, standing was Hermione, Malfoy, Ron and Ak!

"Hey!" Harry yelled to them, his spirits soaring upon seeing them as he stood up. "How did you guys get over there?"

"Run across!" Hermione yelled.

"What? No, not now," yelled Harry back. He looked behind him for a way out, but the slide that he had come down had mysteriously vanished. "How do we get out of here?"

"Run across the bridge!" yelled Malfoy, cupping his hands over his mouth.

"Why don't you come over here?"

"Trust us!" yelled Ron. "Just run over as fast as you can!"

"Nah, I'm kind of tired," said Harry, the fear that he had just finished experiencing took a toll on his body. "Think I'll just stroll across."

Harry took a step forward.

"No Harry!" yelled Ak. "Run!"

Suddenly, where there was once just a bridge, there was now a blade filled torture machine. The bottomless pit all around the bridge erupted into flames, and above the bridge there were swinging pendulums, but these were not ball pendulums, these were gigantic, swinging knives and blades, the size of a guillotine's. There were at least ten of them, each a few feet away from the other, wavering at random intervals.

"Woah!" yelled Harry, stopping dead in his tracks, inches away from being sliced in half by the first blade. "You didn't tell me these things were going to come up!"

"If you had just run across like we told you to," said Malfoy, "then you would be with us. Now, they are all not swinging in a pattern anymore."

"So what can I do?" gasped Harry, feeling the wind of the blade whoosh by him, practically blowing him over.

"I guess you just got to go by each separately," shrugged Hermione. "Carefully."

"What!?" wheezed Harry. "There has to be an easier way to do this!"

"I don't think there is..." sighed Malfoy. "You've just got to run."

"Why run," grinned Harry, getting an idea, "when you can fly?" He transformed his shoulders into his magnificent Gryffin wings and jumped off of the Stone bridge, quickly flew past the swinging blades, not even coming within feet of one. He did a little somersault in the air and landed right next to his other four group members.

"Having wings comes in handy," said Harry, transforming his shoulders back to normal. "Saves you from having to get sliced in half.... By the way, what is this place?"

"This is where we all fell down to," said Hermione, throwing her hands into the air. Now, the swinging blades and fire was gone, only the innocent looking regular Stone bridge was left. "A trap door opened up under each of us, quickly bringing us down here."

"So, what is... here?"

“This is the first test that the heroes wanting to test their skills take,” continued Hermione. “According to that Bob the ghost guy, this is the speed test. There are three more, a courage, intelligence, and strength one.”

“So, how do we get to the next test?” asked Harry, looking at where they were, which was completely door-less.

“That’s what we want to know,” said Malfoy, looking around. Harry turned his head up, to see if there was any way out. Then saw there, right above their heads, was a rather small hole in the wall, but large enough for someone to fit through.

“Up there!” said Harry, pointing to his find. “Maybe we have to go through that hole.”

“Sounds like the best idea so far,” said Ak.

“But how do we get up there?” asked Hermione.

“Ahem,” coughed Harry, sprouting his wings again. “I can fly you all up. Grab on.”

Harry put out his arms and Hermione grabbed hold of them. Ron grabbed hold of her waist, Ak grabbed hold of him, and Malfoy grabbed hold of him. This wasn’t going to be a light load.

“One... two... three... go!” said Harry, heaving them all up. He got barely a foot off of the ground when it became almost unbearable, it was like trying to pull a full grown oak tree out of the ground. His human form simply would not do.

Harry morphed into the rest of his Gryffin form, and immediately felt renewed strength flow through him. What used to be heavier than an elephant was now lighter than a feather. He easily lifted the four of them up to the hole in the ceiling, and got the first glimpse of the next test.

“What’s it like, Harry?” asked Hermione, Ron and Malfoy telepathically together.

“You don’t want to know,” gasped Harry. He lifted them up quickly now, so they could see what lay before them as well. Once they were all up, he let them go and wonder how in the world they were going to get passed this task.

Before them lay an ocean of lava and fire. It stretched out to the sides as far as the eye could see, though it was relatively narrow, someone could practically jump right over it, if they could jump about thirty feet. Harry’s first thought was just to fly over it again, but floating above the flowing lava was a massive fire that erupted every now and then, getting larger and hotter every time. If Harry flew over that thing, he’d quickly become roast gryffin.

“How are we supposed to cross this?” asked Harry, returning to his normal form.

“Let me try something,” said Malfoy, licking his lips and pulling up his sleeves. He aimed his wand at the molten lava. “Glacius!”

A massive, white beam burst out from Malfoy’s wand, hitting the lava. But, as powerful as the spell was, it had barely any effect. Only the exact spot that Malfoy hit changed to ice, and it stayed like that for only a second before it melted.

“Well, that’s the best freezing spell I know,” sighed Malfoy, stepping back.

“So... what do we do?” asked Ak, turning to them. His doing that hurt Harry’s sprits. If Malfoy couldn’t do anything and Ak couldn’t do anything, what chance did they have?

“Well,” said Hermione, “we can’t go over it, we definitely can’t go around it, and we can’t go under it...”

“So we’ve got to go through it,” said Ron seriously, eyeing the river of fire as if it were some sort of opponent.

“What?” asked Harry. “What are you talking about?”

“We’ve got to swim across it,” he said backing up slowly, looking like he wanted a running start.

“What? Ron, no!” gasped Hermione, running over to try and stop him. But, she was too late. Ron had already sprinted off, all the way to the edge of the stone that separated the surface from the lava. When he reached that point, he gave no hesitation. He only jumped.

“RON!” yelled the four of them together as he jumped right into the pool of lava. His arms waving wildly, and his mouth screaming, Ron fell into the sea of fire and plummeted all the way to the bottom, going under it and disappearing from sight.

“RON! NO!” yelled Harry, going to the edge of the stone and trying to see if there was any sign of his best friend. He looked all around, but to no avail. He had disappeared into the sea of liquid heat. Harry bowed his head down.

“I’m okay!” came a voice suddenly.

“What...?” asked Harry, looking up.

“It’s me, Ron! I’m okay!”

Harry looked into the lava... the voice was coming from inside it!

“How can you possibly be okay!?” demanded Malfoy. “Your skin should be melting off of your bones! How can you possibly be okay!?”

“The lava and fire are not real,” said Ron, sounding perfectly okay. “Just jump on in, you’ll be fine.”

The four of them looked at each other, wondering whether or not to believe him. Was it really Ron? Was he really alright? Was it some sort of trick?

“I get it now!” said Hermione suddenly. “This is the test of courage! This one sees if you are brave enough to make the ultimate sacrifice when there are no other possibilities, if you would be willing to give up your life in battle.”

“Couldn’t they just have somebody ask us if we were brave, instead of having this?” asked Ak, not looking as though he was in any hurry to try his luck.

“I can’t believe Ron was the bravest of us all to jump in,” said Malfoy.

“Some call it bravery... others insanity,” commented Hermione, walking up to the edge of the Stone and trying to get up the courage to dip the tip of her toe in.

“Well, if Ron here could do it, than any of us can,” said Malfoy, rubbing his hands together and backing up a bit. “Here goes nothing!” He closed his eyes and ran as fast as he could toward the sea of flames. Once he reached the edge of the bricks he leapt in, not daring to open his eyes. Just like Ron, he fell through the lava, making a small splash, and disappearing inside of it.

“Malfoy!” yelled Harry, crouching over the dark red sea. “Did you make it?”

“Sure did!” he called back, sounding perfectly potty. “Come on in, the lava’s fine!”

“Well, that’s good enough for me,” said Ak. “See you on the other side you two!” Not even taking a running start, Ak just walked up to the edge, closed his eyes, took another step out and fell right through, without even making a splash.

“Come on Harry,” whimpered Hermione. “Let’s do it together.”

“Fine, if it will make you feel any better,” said Harry, trying to sound brave, though he felt that doing it with someone else made him feel better than doing it by himself. They walked to the edge together and held hands.

“On the count of three,” said Hermione, swallowing hard and looking down at her fiery fate. Even though both of them knew it wasn’t real, it was still extremely intimidating. “One... two... three... go!”

Together, they jumped up and into the flaming ocean. Harry had to practically pull Hermione off the edge before she finally fell in with him. Once Harry touched the lava and fire,

he cringed and closed his eyes, his brain expecting some sort of pain to come. But, to his surprise, he felt nothing. Not even so much as a tingle. It was as if he was just falling through air.

It wasn't even that long of all fall. Harry and Hermione were barely falling for half a second before their feet touched the ground. They ended up in a very small and dark room that had a single door with a dim light coming through.

"Hey!" exclaimed Ron somewhat sarcastically when Hermione and Harry landed down there with them. "Hermione! I thought you and I were together!"

"Oh Ron, Harry just needed someone to jump on in with him," smiled Hermione.

"Aww..." said Malfoy cutely. "Did widdle Harry need someone to jump in the lava with him?"

"Shut up Malfoy," said Harry, pushing him away.

"Anyways..." said Ak, breaking them up. "Back to the tasks at hand."

"I assume we go through that door," said Harry, pointing to the only way out.

"Thanks for that stunning report Captain Obvious," grinned Malfoy.

The five of them marched over to the door, having no clue what to expect next. After a bridge of swinging blades and then an ocean of fire and lava, what could you expect? They entered the room, the door closed automatically behind them, and they were shocked by what was inside.

There was nothing in the room except for one, massive, golden throne. Seated upon it was a very old and decrepit looking monster. But, through its long and dangly gray hair, wrinkles and colorless flesh, Harry could tell what it was: a Sphinx.

"Greetings... heroes," it spoke, very slowly, sounding like a bucket full of dust. "I congratulate... you five... on... getting this... far. You are... halfway done... with your... tests."

"Many thanks," said Harry, who had experience in dealing with Sphinxes before. "But, we're kind of in a hurry to get out of here. You see, we need to get back to our group. So, if you could just give us the riddle-"

"Ahh," coughed the Sphinx. "A bunch of... quick minded... heroes are you. Well... we'll see... just how... quick minded... you really... are."

"Alright!" said Hermione, who looked as through she wanted a crack at the riddle. "Tell us your conundrum."

"Very...well. But... I must... warn you... if you... guess wrong... than all five... of you... shall perish."

"Oh yeah?" said Malfoy. "How's an old bird like you going to kill us? I bet we can take you down."

To this, the Sphinx gave a coughing laugh.

"Oh..." he groaned. "I will... not be... the one... to kill you. Dede'ft will."

"Who's Dede'ft?" demanded Harry.

"I am!" hissed a massive snake that suddenly appeared from behind the Sphinx's throne. Even though it was mostly all coiled up, it was still taller than the entire room and as thick as a tree trunk. It had two giant red eyes, and black mandibles on either side of its mouth that clicked and hissed for it.

"What did it say?" Hermione asked Harry.

"It said the he's Dede'ft," whimpered Harry. Dede'ft was even bigger than a Basilisk, and those were bad enough already.

"Wait a minute here!" said Ron suddenly. "How come you're so old, Mr. Sphinx, but Dede'ft here looks like he's still in his youth of snake hood?"

“Well...” coughed the Sphinx. “You see... while I am... the original... Riddle Keeper... Dede’ft... is not... the original... snake guardian. Every year... the snake guardian explodes... bringing forth... a hundred new... baby snakes. The strongest of... the hundred or so... eats the rest... and continues the cycle.”

“So it ate all of its brothers and sisters?” gulped Harry, not really looking at the massive snake. It was far too frightening of a sight.

“Thank you for telling them, Sphinx,” hissed Dede’ft. “But, as much as I liked snake meat, that’s not to say I wouldn’t appreciate a little change to human flesh.”

“Well, he may be big, but I bet one good spell could still take him down,” said Malfoy, not sounding as brave as his words as snake glared at him and spat some venom out.

“Very... well then,” continued the Sphinx. “If you... think you... are so... bold... here is... your riddle: It smells not with its nose, but with its fork. While it has no digits, it can still do work. Once devoured, though, that will be the last thing you shall think, as you are slowly eaten, he shall not even blink. What creature is this?”

Right after it stopped speaking, the Sphinx collapsed in its chair from talking so fast. It took in long and deep loud breaths, exhausted.

“What kind of question is that?” demanded Ron.

“That’s the craziest one I’ve ever heard,” said Malfoy.

“Do you... want to... give up?” grinned the Sphinx weakly.

“No way!” yelled Ak, looking as though he was thinking hard.

“What kind of thing smells with a fork?” asked Hermione to herself, looking in almost deeper thought than Ak.

“Well, don’t piano tuners smell their tuning forks after they hit a piano string?” asked Ron. “Maybe the creature is a piano tuner!”

“Ron,” sighed Harry. “If you don’t have anything intelligent to say, don’t say anything at all.”

“So the monster has no digits, eh?” asked Malfoy.

“Yes... that is... correct.”

“So, what?” said Ron again. “Digits are numbers, right? Maybe the creature is stupid and can’t think numbers. Maybe it’s a really stupid creature!”

“No Ron,” said Malfoy. “The answer is not you.”

“Good one,” laughed Harry, nudging Malfoy in the side.

“Thanks.”

Harry returned to thinking. What kind of monster smelled with a fork? Well, he certainly couldn’t think of anything that did. Harry moved onto the next clue: it has no digits. What did that mean? Harry decided to skip over that one as well, to the more unpleasant clue; the one about being eaten.

“So this creature must take a while to devour something, since the clue said you will be slowly eaten,” said Harry out loud to himself.

“But there are dozens of creatures that take long time to digest food,” said Hermione. “It’s way too vague to start thinking there.”

“Ha ha,” laughed Dede’ft suddenly, curling its long body around the throne. “The fools, they will never figure out the answer.”

What was he talking about? Didn’t he know that Harry could understand him?

Just then it hit Harry. He hadn’t spoken directly to Dede’ft yet, so he didn’t know that he was a Parseltongue! He had to take advantage of this situation.

“Oh Ron!” complained Harry loudly and sarcastically, so that Dede’ft could overhear them, formulating a plan in his head. “It’s too bad we can’t figure out this really hard riddle!” Ron gave him a funny look, Harry signaled to him to just play along. Confused, he merely nodded his head.

“It’s so hard,” said Harry again, loudly enough so that Dede’ft could hear. “It’s too bad we don’t have the mind of a snake, like Dede’ft over there, then I’m sure we could figure it out!”

The gigantic snake turned it’s head quickly towards Harry, glaring at him.

“Well,” he hissed, “at least one of them has a brain. Of course if those pathetic humans had my brain they would have figured out the riddle by now. To a snake, these sort of things are easy.”

“Yep,” continued Harry, “snakes are so smart! I bet that Dede’ft over there already knows the answer!”

To this, the snakes gave a chuckle.

“Well of course I know the answer! Sphinx told me it a long time ago, when I was still a child. I, of course, love the answer, it’s a small piece of respect for my kind.”

Harry was getting closer now, if only he could get a bit more out of Dede’ft then he would unknowingly blurt out the solution. He decided to just cut to the chase.

“It’s too bad Dede’ft couldn’t just tell you the answer,” said Harry for the last time, now having the four others in his group stare at him.

“Oh, the silly child,” hissed Dede’ft, shaking his head. “Even if I could tell him that the answer to the riddle was snake, I wouldn’t. I am very hungry; it’s been so long since I’ve eaten anything bigger than a rat.”

That was far more than Harry needed to know. Dede’ft had told them the answer! It was snake!

“Of course,” said Harry out loud. “A snake doesn’t have a nose, it smells with its forked tongue! And they don’t have digits... also known as fingers! Digits is another name for fingers! Of course snakes don’t have fingers, they don’t even have arms or legs! And the last clue... oh yeah! Snakes eat their food whole, and they stay in their digestive tracks for a while, and of course they wouldn’t even blink! Snakes don’t have eyelids to blink with!”

Hermione, Ron, Malfoy and Ak were all staring at Harry, wide-eyed and with gaping mouths. Hermione ran up to Harry and hugged him.

“You’re a genius!” she yelled.

“What... happened?” asked the Sphinx. “I fell... asleep.”

“I figured out your riddle!” yelled Harry, turning to face the decrepit creature and smirking on the inside.

“Well then... what is... your... answer?” demanded the Sphinx.

“The answer is... snake!” yelled Harry.

As soon as the word left his mouth, the Sphinx let out an ear-piercing screech. It jumped up onto its hind-legs and waved its arms in the air, only increasing its volume and frequency. Everyone covered their ears, but it didn’t help. Relief only arrived when the Sphinx finally stopped screaming and collapsed onto its throne.

“You are...” gasped the Sphinx, “truly worthy... of the... treasure. Or... at least... whatever is... left of... it. Dede’ft! Move... the throne... over... and let... them pass.”

Dede’ft, looking extremely angry that he hadn’t gotten to eat even one of them, bowed his head down and pushed the golden throne over to the wall, revealing a hidden passageway underneath.

“You may... go down... to your... next task,” croaked the Sphinx, looking even older now than it did before. “And... good luck... to you all.”

“Thank you,” bowed Harry. Walking past the infuriated snake and toward the staircase that looked even older and more feeble than the Sphinx. The small steps had lost all of their color and were now covered in several inches of dust. Covering the dust and strung across the hallways leading down was an uncountable number of cobwebs, with spiders that looked like they would gladly take a bite of one of the five.

Bravely, Harry put his foot on the first step and began the treacherous walk down. With each step, it got darker, and no two stairs were the same height. Several times, Harry fell over, ending up with a mouthful of spider webs. By the time they reached the room that horrible staircase led to, Harry deeply regretted going out in front.

“So what task is this one going to be?” asked Harry, spitting out a spider.

“Well, let’s see here,” said Hermione. “We already did the speed and courage tests, and I think the last one was the intelligence test, so this one must be the strength test; the final one.”

“Good,” said Ak. “Maybe after this one, we can get out of here.”

“I hope all we have to do for this test is lift a barbell or something,” sighed Ron.

Harry grinned and looked around. Just like the other rooms, except from the one with the infinitely long fire river, this one was quite small, about as big as the common room with stone walls, ceiling and floor. But, the thing that set this one apart was the fact that there was a floating scale in the middle of the room.

But, this wasn’t just any scale. It was one of the old fashioned ones, a golden balancing scale. Also, this one already had two balanced objects on it: on the left, a feather, on the right, a beating human heart.

“How horrible,” said Ak, covering his mouth.

“No it isn’t,” said Hermione, walking up to it. “Don’t you know any Egyptian Mythology? This is the scale used in the Weighing of the Heart Ceremony.”

“The what?” asked Malfoy.

“The Weighing of the Heart Ceremony,” said Hermione, sounding annoyed. “Whenever an Egyptian died, especially a pharaoh, they would be brought to some sort of spiritual judgment room. There, their heart would be weighed against a feather. If it was heavier, than they were supposedly evil, and they had no afterlife. But, if it was lighter, then they could enter Heaven.”

“Sounds like fun,” said Harry, walking up to the scale next to Hermione. “But what does that have to do with this test?”

“I dunno,” said Ron, walking up next to him. “Maybe we have to eat the heart or something.” He put out his arm, grabbed hold of the heart, and brought it up to his mouth, pretending to eat it.

Then, just as the heart left the scale, the door that they used to get in vanished and the room began shaking furiously, knocking the five of them to the floor. Ron impishly placed the heart back on the scale, as if trying to stop whatever was happening.

“Welcome heroes,” boomed a voice that seemed to be coming from all around them, “to the final challenge; the test of your strength. For this, you must defeat me, Amemait, the Devourer!”

“Who’s Amemait?” Harry asked Hermione, bouncing all over the room like popcorn.

“Remember how I said if your heart was heavier than the feather, than you would have no afterlife?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, you would have no afterlife because Amemait would swoop down and eat you.”

“Great...” sighed Harry. Suddenly, the room stopped shaking and the golden scale disappeared. Quickly taking its place was one of the most horrible creatures Harry had ever seen.

The beast had the head of a crocodile. Its teeth looked sharper than nails, though they were not as piercing as its human eyes. Going down to its torso, it had lion skin and arms, furry and fuzzy all over. For its waist and below, though, it had hippopotamus-like features, especially the tail. All over, however, it had a very feminine appearance, as if it were trying to seduce and kill them at the same time.

“I shall fight each of you individually,” said Amemait, in a rather silky voice. It was rather funny, seeing a crocodile speak with a voice like that. “If all five of you are defeated by me, than you shall all perish. You, the girl... you shall be first.”

“Me?” gasped Hermione, pointing to herself.

“Yes you!” yelled Amemait, suddenly not sounding so suave.

“Good luck, Hermione,” said Harry, backing up with the rest of the others against the wall.

“Yeah, you’ll need it,” added Malfoy.

Hermione and the Amemait faced each other, each on an opposite side of the room. Hermione brandished her wand, looking fierce, though not so much as Amemait was. There they both stood for a few moments, until Hermione made the first move.

“Stupefy!” she yelled. The red beam shot out of her wand, and right for Amemait. But, just at the last second, Amemait shoved out her massive hippopotamus blubber, making it take up most of her front. The spell hit the rubbery skin and bounced right off, disappearing into the wall.

“Now it’s my turn!” yelled Amemait. Not giving any more warning, she ran at full sprint, which was especially fast considering her size, straight for Hermione. She didn’t have any time to react; Amemait hit her, and pressed her much smaller body up against the wall. Harry could just picture every bone in her body being broken.

“HERMIONE!” yelled Harry, Ron, Malfoy and Ak together.

After literally rubbing her into the wall a bit more, and creating a few very unpleasant crunching sounds, Amemait backed off and Hermione fell to the floor, defeated and unconscious, no more than a fleshy sack of broken bones.

“Who’s next!?” she demanded, glaring at the four of them.

“I am!” yelled Ron, jumping up.

“No you’re not!” yelled Malfoy, standing up next to him.

“What are you talking about? I’m next!” said Ron sternly. “I have to defend Hermione’s honor!”

“This isn’t about honor,” spat Malfoy. “This is about life and death. Now, you could go in there and wave your wand around and waste some more time. Time Hermione may not have. Or, you could let me go in there, I could beat that abomination, we can get out of here, and then get her to a hospital.”

“Fine,” hissed Ron, sitting back down.

“You! The yellow haired one!” yelled Amemait, pointing at Malfoy. “Come! I hunger for battle!”

“Not once I’m through with you,” spat Malfoy, walking to where Hermione had stood. He pushed up his sleeved and took out his wand, waiting for her to make the first move. “You’re not going to have a stomach to hunger with anymore.”

Malfoy didn’t have to wait very long for the battle to begin. A moment later, Amemait came rushing at Malfoy, utilizing the same strategy she had used before. But this time was different. This time Malfoy was ready.

“Kooverta Maximus!” he yelled, creating a massive and invisible shield in front of himself. Amemait ran right into that instead, hurting herself far more than Malfoy.

“That was a mean trick!” she yelled, rubbing her head.

“Sometimes you’ve got to fight ugly to beat ugly people,” laughed Malfoy.

“So, you think I’m ugly do you?” demanded Amemait. “Well, let me show you that looks aren’t everything!”

With that, Amemait just disappeared into thin air.

“What? Where’d she go?” asked Malfoy, looking around the small room. “Something that big can’t disappear.”

“MALFOY!” yelled Harry, suddenly seeing her pop back into the visible world again. “Behind you!”

But, it was too late. Amemait didn’t waste any time and quickly put her mouth over Malfoy’s wand arm, biting it right off with a loud crunching sound. The arm fell to the floor in a bloody mess, with Malfoy screaming and yelling, now laying on his stomach, crawling towards his hand. He made a grab for his wand with his other hand, but Amemait kicked the arm across the room, far out of his reach. She put one hippo leg on his back, preventing him from going anywhere.

“Do you give up or do you want me to kill you?” asked Amemait, smiling.

“I...” stuttered Malfoy, looking lost. He had never admitted defeat before, and the fact that he almost had to was painful. “I... well... I give up.”

“Excellent choice,” said Amemait, taking her foot off of his back. Malfoy crawled over to the wall that Hermione was against and tried to see if he could help her, even if he didn’t have his wand anymore.

“Who shall be by next victim?” asked Amemait, crossing her sharp clawed hands.

“You and me,” said Ron seriously, stepping forward. “Let’s go.”

“Alright then fire-head,” snapped Amemait, walking back to her corner. “Let’s see if you’re any better than your friends were.”

Harry sighed and put his head into his hands. Ron would be little more than walking meat for Amemait. If Hermione and Malfoy couldn’t beat her, what chance did he stand? Even though Ron must have known this, he was looking confident, wand out and a grin on his face. He had proved back at the lava test that he was brave, stupid yes, but still very brave as well.

“YEEARRGG!” belched Amemait, breaking into a full run once again, only this him, turning invisible as well. How could Ron possible avoid the invisible tank?

But, Ron did have a plan. He quickly transformed into his chameleon form and became just as invisible as Amemait was. He must have moved out of the way, because a second later, there was a massive colliding sound, and several large cracks appeared in the wall that Ron had been near moments ago.

“Where are you!?” demanded Amemait, turning visible again. “Show yourself or else I will- AARRGG!”

Ron suddenly showed himself, but not in a way that Amemait would have liked it. He appeared right on top of her crocodile head and was gnawing on her right eye.

“Way to go Ron!” cheered Harry, amazed that his friend was not unconscious by now. But, that happiness did not last. As soon as Amemait got herself back together, she reached one of her lion hands up to where Ron was and picked him off of her head quite easily.

“Any last words?” asked Amemait slyly as she placed Ron on the ground and held him there. She lifted one massive foot in the air right above him and then brought it down quickly, crushing Ron’s tiny chameleon body like it was a bug.

“RON! NO!” yelled Harry. Amemait removed her foot from Ron and revealed a small green puddle that barely resembled a chameleon. It suddenly began vibrating and glowing, and Ron’s human form appeared. Even though you were not supposed to carry over injuries when you transformed, what he had just suffered was evidently too much for the magic to fix; he still did not look much better than he did in his chameleon form. He had blood all over him, not to mention hundreds of bruises and internal bleeding spots. Harry had to beat Amemait now, three of his friends needed his help.

“You! The one with the glasses!” roared Amemait, pointing a claw at Harry. “I wish to fight you next.”

“Be careful what you wish for,” mocked Harry, stepping out, “it might just come true.”

“Oh,” said Amemait, grinning, “if my wish comes true, you will find yourself in a world of pain like none you have ever experienced.”

“You don’t know what I’ve experienced,” grimaced Harry, taking out his wand and remembering the times that the Cruciatus Curse had been put on him. He glared at Amemait, trying to picture his victory.

Just as Harry imagined how she would look with her crocodile head severed off, Amemait began the battle and suddenly rushed straight at him, in the same manner that she had with the past three. But, Harry was ready.

“Parium Terrus!” he yelled, trying to sound confident. A long, thin and hard string shout of the tip of his wand, and flew through the air, right at Amemait’s big hippo legs. It magically wrapped itself around them, binding her feet together and making her fall flat on the ground.

“Saber!” Harry yelled, getting the sword ready to plunge right through Amemait’s body, finishing her once and for all. The light-gray sword was fully extended now and Harry rushed straight at her, feeling the adrenaline and energy burst that only the thrill that that of an oncoming victory could bring.

He raised the sword up above her massive body and was getting ready to plunge it straight through when suddenly she disappeared into thin air, just like before. Instead of going through the soft hide of a lion, the sword’s tip hit the ground with a clang.

“Behind you!” Amemait abruptly yelled, just as Harry was bringing his sword back to the normal position. Harry quickly turned around, to try and defend against whatever she may do, but all he saw was a clawed paw flying straight at his face.

“AARRGG!” groaned Harry, covering the bloody gashes Amemait’s claws had driven into his face. They were sharper than swords and longer than knives. One of the claws had pierced a hole in Harry’s cheek, and through the pain of the severed nerves and flowing blood he could feel the dry air blowing in and out through it.

“I can beat you even with both my feet tied!” thundered Amemait, grinning and striking Harry again on the other side of his face. This time, the pain was far too intense and Harry dropped his wand on the floor. His face was a bloody mess now, little more than ground beef.

“Oh, look what I’ve got!” said Amemait mockingly as she picked up Harry’s wand. She tapped the binds around her feet with it and the string disappeared, freeing her legs. Using them, she walked over to Harry, who was now kneeling on the ground, blood pouring through his fingers that he was using to cover his face. She grabbed his hair and lifted his head up high. She put a single extended claw from her other hand up to the front of his neck, ready to slit Harry’s throat.

“I offer you the same choice as your other friend,” said Amemait, gently rubbing the skin of Harry’s neck with her claw, not piercing it, but coming close. “Do you wish for me to kill you now or later?”

“Neither,” spat Harry through his cut up face. Along with whatever usually comes out with your mouth when you spit, there was quite a bit of blood that seeped in from his forehead through his cheek holes, along with a few chunky pieces of flesh that Harry could only assume did not belong there.

Harry, having though it was impossible to do it any faster than he had previously done it before, performed the fastest human to gryffin transformation that he had ever done in his life. Barely a millionth of a second passed before where once a bloody Harry stood, there was now a fully-grown, perfectly healthy looking gryffin, though invisible.

Using the gryffin’s natural strength, Harry easily pushed Amemait over and onto the ground, like his tripping spell did before. This took her by surprise and evidently hurt her considerably as well.

“You are no ordinary wizard, boy,” she said, not looking as sure of herself as she did before. “But, even a non-ordinary wizard is no match for a god!”

With that, she quickly disappeared again and reappeared right behind Harry, hitting him on the back with her huge feet, driving him a few inches into the stony ground. It was as if a boulder had just fallen on his back; the pain was intense. So much, that Harry was forced to return to his not much better human form.

“Last chance, boy,” groaned Amemait, once again grabbing Harry’s head. “Die now or later?”

Harry’s mind was racing. He had no more energy left to transform, and Amemait had his wand. He didn’t know how to perform any other magic, besides morphing, without a wand, so there was nothing he could do.

“I… give up,” heaved Harry, still breathing hard. Amemait threw his head onto the ground quite powerfully.

“Good choice,” grinned Amemait. “Last and probably least… you, the pale skinned one with the black jacket. It’s your turn to face me.”

“It’s all up to you, Ak,” said Harry quietly, using what little energy he had left after crawling over to Hermione, Ron and Malfoy. If Ak lost, then they would all be dead. He had to win… he had to.

“Don’t worry, Harry,” said Ak, removing his jacket and glaring at Amemait with hate all over his face. “I’ve faced worse than this.”

“Hah!” laughed Amemait, getting ready to run straight for Ak. “Let’s see if you’re all that you say you are, boy.”

“I’d like to see the same about you,” grinned Ak, getting into his fighting position which was very similar to Tci’s. It must be a Durmstrang thing....

“GRAAG!” roared Amemait as she hurled herself at Ak so loudly and fiercely that it scared Harry. But, Ak was not affected. He remained calm and cool and raised his wand, aiming right at the beast.

“Amemait Deletrius Tout!” yelled Ak even more powerfully than Amemait did. His voice echoed throughout the entire room, shaking the walls and making some bricks fall from the ceiling. Amemait stopped dead in her tracks, for surprise at what was going on.

“What spell is that!?” she demanded, looking genuinely frightened. But, Ak didn’t answer; for a second later, it began to take effect. All over, Amemait glowed a bright white, getting brighter every second, until it began turning colors that Harry didn’t even know existed. Brighter still she grew, belching and screaming as if in intense pain. Finally, she reached the brightness peak: beams shot out all over her, filling the entire room with the same level of

brilliance. Harry closed his eyes, but it didn't help. The light was so intense that it shone through his eyelids.

Then, suddenly, as quickly as it had taken effect, the spell wore off, and all the light disappeared, taking with it Amemait. Harry blinked his eyes a few times, to make sure that the darker light wasn't just playing tricks on him, but it was true. Amemait was nowhere to be seen in the room.

"Well," sighed Ak, twirling his wand and sounding as if he thought he just did nothing spectacular. "That was fun."

"Ak?" asked Harry, in awe of what just happened. Ak beat Amemait with just one spell! "What spell did you use on her?"

"It's a very powerful one," he said, rocking back and forth on his feet. "It erases a single object from the universe. Since it would have been near impossible to beat that thing using contemporary methods, since she kept on teleporting all around, it was my only choice."

Harry stared at Ak, seeing him in a new light. How powerful was he, really? What other spells did he know? What else was he keeping from them?

"Ak...." began Harry, his mind buzzing. "What exactly-"

"No time for more questions," he said, not looking at Harry and walking over to Hermione. "We've got to heal you guys first."

"Oh... right!" said Harry, remembering that his friends were hurt and he wasn't in much better condition

"Ennervate!" said Ak softly, pointing his wand at Hermione. She instantly opened her eyes and sat up.

"What...?" she sighed. "Did we beat her?"

"Yes," said Harry, patching up his face. It wasn't as good a job as Madam Pomfrey would have done, but it was good for now. "Amemait is no more."

"Literally," added Ak, enervating Ron and healing Malfoy. Harry just noticed that, along with himself, Malfoy had been staring at Ak the entire time.

"Ak..." he said slowly, standing up after being healed. "I don't even know that curse, and I know almost every Dark Spell there is."

"Exactly," said Ak, brushing himself off and putting his jacket back on. "You know ALMOST every Dark Spell. At Durmstrang, we have access to thousands of Dark Arts books, but the really good ones are restricted, some even to teachers. That spell was in one of those books... so really, I'm not even supposed to know it."

"Oh," was all that Malfoy could mutter, still looking as though he were amazed.

"Well, I know it's great that you beat Amemait," said Ron, standing up. "But, we have a new problem now. How do we get out of here?"

"Oh, that's easy," said Harry lazily. "All we have to do is... is-"

Harry looked around and discovered that getting out would be no easy feat. The door that had entered through had disappeared, and there didn't seem to be a sign of any other exits or entrances anywhere else.

Then, as if by command, the golden scale that had been there when the five of them first entered the room reappeared, in the same exact place that it was before.

"Congratulations on beating the guardian," came a soothing voice from all around them once again. "You are one of the few to have ever done that, beaten Amemait that is. Most who pass this test choose the feather version instead."

"Yeah, that's great," said Harry, interrupting. "But, how do we get out of here?"

“Push the feather down,” came the voice. Harry looked at the scale and saw on the left side the feather.

“All I have to do is push the feather down?” asked Harry, astonished.

“Yes,” said the voice.

“Okay!” said Harry happily. He skipped over to the scale, rubbed his hand together, and pushed down on the side of the scale that had the feather on it. But, no matter how hard he pushed, the scale would not go down. He put all of his energy into it, but it was far from enough.

“Well then,” gasped Harry, wiping the sweat off of his forehead. “I guess this calls for a little muscle enhancement!” He took his wand out, muttered the engorgement charm, and tapped his arms. Almost instantly, his biceps grew twenty times their regular size, increasing his strength by even more.

“Nice guns!” commented Malfoy, grinning and nodding his head.

“Thanks,” grinned Harry back, flexing. “I almost got suspended for bringing these in.”

“Can we just push the feather down and get this over with?” asked Hermione impatiently, stomping her foot up and down.

“Fine,” sighed Harry. He rubbed his hands together again, cracked his knuckles, and pushed down on the feather side of the scale. This time, it barely took any effort to push it all the way down. When Harry could push it no more, the scale glowed a bright gold for a second, and a door suddenly appeared in front of them, leading out.

“Wait a minute here,” said Harry, thinking this was almost too easy. “Are you telling me that if we just pushed the feather down when we first saw the scale, instead of grabbing the heart, then we would have to have never fought that horrible monster?”

“I guess so,” shrugged Hermione, walking towards the door. “Since the feather was so heavy, it still tested your strength to see if you could push it down, even if it wasn’t as hard of a task as beating an Egyptian God.”

Harry smacked Ron on the head. With his ultra muscles, it must have really hurt.

“Ow! What did you do that for!?”

“You were the one that touched the heart in the first place,” said Harry, tapping his arms with his wand and returning them to normal size. “If it wasn’t for you joking around, we could have been out of this pyramid by now!”

“Sorry!” groaned Ron, rubbing his head and wincing.

“Sorry wouldn’t have brought us back from the dead if Ak hadn’t beaten Amemait,” said Harry, feeling weaker at the loss of his muscles. The five of them marched themselves over to the dark door. Just like the other entranceways, this one was very shadowy. Only, this room appeared to have no light at all; it was pitch black.

“Hermione?” asked Harry, when they all entered the room that was shrouded in darkness, and feeling a little frightened. “What task is this?”

“This isn’t a task,” she said, though Harry couldn’t see her. “This should be the reward room, where we get something for completing the four tasks and then we are allowed to exit.”

“I hope our reward is that massive treasure we saw before we started any of these stupid tasks,” said Malfoy. Harry had to agree with him. It would be nice to deposit all of that into his Gringott’s account. Imagine how many Wizard Duel packs that could buy...

Suddenly, Harry’s fantasies were cut off by the door behind them closing, destroying any hope of retreat they had should anything bad happen. It was just like in the first hallway, when the light went out. Only, this time, Harry had four other people with him.

“Hey guys, how are we going to get out of here?” asked Harry, wanting to hear their voices to remind himself that he was not alone.

There was no answer.

“Guys...?” asked Harry, now feeling frightened.

Once again there was no answer.

He could have sworn he heard breathing... but was it one of his friends... or was it some sort of horrible monster, like another Amemait.?

“Guys...?”

There was no answer....

Just then, through the darkness, something jumped out of nowhere, and right onto Harry, pinning him down and knocking him unconscious.

Chapter 19- The Guardian Of Immortality

“Harry!”

A sharp voice suddenly rang through Harry’s head. It was so painful, hearing it echo around his brain. Harry groaned and pressed hard against his forehead, to try and stop some of the pain. As he did this, he suddenly realized that his eyes were closed. Harry quickly opened them, revealing a strange sight.

Himself, Ron, Hermione, Malfoy and Ak were each in a room around the same size as the past ones they had been in. Except, this time, they were each in a separate cage, placed in random spots around the room, like some sort of human zoo. Harry stood up and grabbed onto the bars, to see if he could break them down since they should be quite old. But, they must have been enchanted or something, because no matter how hard Harry tried, the bars didn’t move.

“Harry!” called Hermione again from her cage, sitting down. “You’re up.”

“Yeah,” yawned Harry back, sitting down too. “Where are we?”

“Don’t know,” Malfoy shrugged.

“And we can’t get out of the cages either,” added Ak, examining his bars. “Someone’s taken our wands.”

Harry, not even thinking of using his wand, reached into his pocket, just to make sure. But, sure enough, there was no wand to be found.

“So what are we going to do?” sighed Harry, feeling lost.

Suddenly, a hole in one of the walls opened up, right next to a big red dot, revealing a door. It flew open, and through it walked an extremely hairy woman, who looked as though she hadn’t had a decent shower or haircut for several years. Her bushy red hair went all the way down to her waist, and Harry could’ve sworn he saw something (or several things) crawling through it. She was quite tall as well, but very skinny, with most of her face covered by hair.

Only her baggy eyes, small nose, mouth and a small, beaded necklace around her neck were visible, and those were almost covered as well.

But, despite the hair that seemed to be a separate organism from the person, the most noticeable feature about the woman was the red glove on her arm. It shone brighter than intense rubies, and it was so beautiful, the second Harry saw it, he desired it.

“So,” barked the woman, stopping before them and crossing her arms, glaring. Her voice sounded odd, as if she hadn’t talked in a while, and wasn’t used to it. But, that was probably true. She must have been thousands of years old if she resided in this place. “Why do you want the Gomotornice?”

“What?” asked Malfoy, sounding flabbergasted..

“We don’t even know what that is!” yelled Ak.

“Yes we do,” sighed Harry. Now, everything was coming together. Bob the Ghost said that heroes tried their luck at the four challenges for the treasure at the end, to be immortalized. What better way to become immortalized than by making an Immortal Potion? The treasure at the end were the five legendary ingredients: the Ring, the Sorceror’s Stone, the Gomotornice, the Havomotornice, and the Bomotornice. The Egyptians had been the ancients that created those items, and they had hidden them in the pyramid.....

“We didn’t know that the Ingredients were in this pyramid,” said Hermione, probably realizing the same thing as Harry. “And we really didn’t know that you had the Gomotornice.”

“Well, whether you knew it or not,” growled the woman, “it is my duty to protect it. Ever since the last hero passed through the challenges, the Guardians of Immortality have not allowed anyone else to create the potion. So, even though you have passed the tests, I cannot allow you to take the Ingredient.”

“That’s okay,” sighed Harry, just wanting to leave. ‘We don’t want to make the potion anyways, We just want to get out of here.”

“Just wait a minute here!” yelled Ron suddenly, taking the woman’s attention away from Harry and over to him. “Are you telling me that the red glove you’re wearing is the Gomotornice?”

“Yes,” she hissed.

“How can we be sure?” asked Ron, stroking his chin. “I mean, what if this is all an act that you are just putting on?”

To this, the woman scrunched up her face at Ron, looking furious. She stomped over to Harry’s cage and reached one of her arms in, grabbing hold of Harry’s arm before he had a chance to react. The woman ripped the Ring off of Harry’s hand, practically taking the finger with it.

Instantly, the second the Ring left Harry’s hand, he felt weak. It was as if a massive weight had just been dropped on his back, and all of his muscles had been ripped out of his body. He felt like a living bowl of jell-o.

The hairy woman took the Ring and touched it to her glove. Immediately, the map popped up into the air, proving that the glove was one of the Legendary Items. A few seconds later, after all of them had seen the map, she removed the Ring from her glove and threw it on the floor. Harry watched it fall, as if it were a juicy cheeseburger and he had had nothing to eat for the past ten years.

“Now you see that this is the real item?” she said, pointing to her glove.

“How did you know that Harry had the Ring?” asked Hermione, swallowing hard.

“I saw it when I put you all in the cages,” she grinned. “And I know that you have the Bracelet, young girl. I used to have that one too, in addition to the Glove, but one day as I was

making my rounds around the pyramid, that damned guardian snake exploded into a hundred littler ones. The snakes overwhelmed me, and I lost the Bracelet. Not knowing I had lost it, I ran away. When I finally realized it was gone, and I returned for it, it was missing.”

“That must have been when I found it!” exclaimed Ron.

“And,” continued the woman, not paying any attention to Ron, “I know that Dumbledore has the Legendary Watch.”

“How do you know Dumbledore has the Watch!?” demanded Hermione. “Nobody except for me, Ron, and Harry know that!”

“Well, that is an interesting tale,” she sighed, though she sounded as though she enjoyed the company, even if they were all in cells. “You see, just like you five here, I was once a Hogwarts student as well.”

“Yes... and!?” yelled Harry, curled up in a corner of his cage, wanting the woman to finish her story as soon as possible so he could get out of the cage and get his Ring back. He didn’t care about her stupid tale, all he wanted was the Ring, and he would never be happy again until it was slipped back on his finger... never.

“Anyways...” she continued after Harry interrupted. “Like you as well, I too wandered off from the main group, probably down the same corridor as well, the one with the huge pile of treasure at the end.”

“Is that treasure real?” asked Malfoy suddenly.

“Oh no,” she said, shaking her head. “It’s only a distraction, to make you stay in that place long enough for the spell there to take effect. It brings you down to the start of the tests. So, I fell victim to the trap and worked my way through the tasks, not worrying about what may happen, just overjoyed by my own sense of superiority that I had passed the tests that so many others had failed. By the time I reached the final room, the one with the treasure in it, I was so full of myself that I wasn’t ready to defend against the Guardian of Immortality at that time. He easily defeated me and cursed me to guard this pyramid for all eternity, just like he would have had to do, if I had not showed up.”

“That’s all well and good,” said Hermione. “But, how do you know that Dumbledore has the Watch?”

“I’ve been in this place for a long time,” she sighed, leaning back. “I’ve had a lot of time to think. Out of all the pyramids in Egypt, why do you think Dumbledore chose to tour this one?”

“Because it’s the best one!” said Malfoy, looking quite confused. No one had ever told him anything of the Immortality Potion, so he was probably very lost.

“Not really, there are many more impressive pyramids,” said Ron.

“Right you are,” she said, pointing to Ron. “So, why choose this one?”

“I... don’t know,” admitted Hermione.

“Well, I believe the reason that he chose this pyramid over all the others is not due to what the children can gather from this place, but what he can gather from this place.”

“Meaning... what?”

“Meaning, Dumbledore wants the treasure that I guard.”

“No way!” yelled Hermione and Ron at the same time.

“Why would he want it?” demanded Ron.

“To keep it away from Voldemort probably,” suggested Hermione.

“Nope,” said the Guardian, shaking her head. “Dumbledore has been coming to this place long before You-Know-Who ever even knew the treasure existed. The other Guardian before me said that he had to keep several children away from the treasure, all of whom were sent through

the tasks by Dumbledore. Of those several, I was the only one who was ever cursed to remain here.”

“Dumbledore told you to go down the wrong path?” asked Ron, sounding as if he were asking if that were the punch line to a bad joke.

“Yes,” she hissed. “I got lost and he found me. Instead of leading me back to the group, he showed me down the wrong path, with hopes that I would get the treasure for him.”

“If Dumbledore wanted it that bad,” said Ron, “why didn’t he just go through the four tasks himself? I mean, if a few second years could do it, there’s no reason why he couldn’t, and then he’d have it.”

“I don’t really know,” she sighed. “But, I think the spell that brings you to the start of the four tasks only works on youth. The Egyptians didn’t want all of their old and wise population dieing out by trying their luck at the tests. However, even if he could get to the tasks, laziness would probably prevent him. That and not wanting to put his own life in danger.”

“There’s no way any of that’s true,” said Hermione sternly.

“Yeah,” said Ron. “If Dumbledore wanted the treasure, then he’d do it himself, and he wouldn’t want the Items for any other reason than to keep them away from Voldemort.”

“Oh no?” question the woman. “What makes you think Dumbledore doesn’t want to make the Immortality Potion for himself?”

There were a few seconds of silence, no one knew what to say.

“You’re wrong,” whispered Hermione.

“Am I?” said the Guardian mysteriously.

“So, you’ve had to guard this place for... how long?” asked Hermione, obviously wanting to change the subject for now.

“Eighteen long years,” she sighed, putting her hands on her legs.

“Wait a minute...” said Ron softly and slowly, as if he had just realized something big. “You’re telling me that eighteen years ago, all Hogwarts students came on a field trip here, and you’ve been here since.

“Yes,” she said, sounding curious.

“And what year were you in at that time?”

“I was a first year.”

“And you have red hair?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” she said, pointing to the hairy beast on her head.

“What are you getting at here Ron?” asked Hermione, sounding irritated.

“Hermione!” exclaimed Ron. “This woman here, the Guardian of Immortality... she’s my sister!”

Chapter 20- Escape From Geb Pyramid

“WHAT!?” yelled everyone, except for Harry, all at once.

“Ron! You don’t have another sister!” yelled Hermione.

“Oh yes I do!” said Ron, eyeing the woman up and down. “Only she’s been in this pyramid for the past eighteen years!”

“What are you talking about?” demanded the woman. “I don’t have any other brothers except for Bill, Charlie and Percy, and they’re all grown up now, not short like you.”

"No Jamie," said Ron, startling her by addressing her with her real name. "After you went missing, mom and dad had four more kids, Fred, George, me and Ginny."

"How do you know my name?" asked Jamie, gasping and walking backwards slowly, away from Ron.

"Because you're my long-lost sister!" exclaimed Ron.

"I don't think so," said Jamie, shaking her head and putting her hands up. "There's no way that's possible."

"Oh yeah, ask me a question about our family," grinned Ron. "Anything at all, something only a true Weasley would know."

"Fine then," said Jamie, looking better. "What are mom and dad's names?"

"Molly and Arthur," said Ron lazily. "Next!"

"Okay," said Jamie, a single drop of sweat going down her face. She thought for a second, trying to think of a good question. "Where did they get married?"

"The North Pole," said Ron again. "Now do you believe me?"

"Not yet," said Jamie, her confidence fading. "This last question is something that only a true Weasley would know. What is the true Weasley Spell?"

"Agricola Bonas Est," said Ron confidently, folding his arms. To this, Jamie suddenly burst into tears, ran towards the cage that held Ron, opened it up, and embraced him... like a brother.

"You are a Weasley!" she sobbed, hugging him tighter.

"What was that last question all about?" asked Malfoy.

"Don't ask," said Ron, his sister finally letting go. "It's an old Weasley thing."

"You didn't even have to go through all those questions," added Hermione. "You could have just figured it out by looking at the hair."

"Um..." added Ak. "Do you think you could open the rest of the cages?"

"What...?" asked Jamie, her eyes red from the tears. "Oh! Oh yes, of course."

"One last question though," said Malfoy as Jamie looked through her keys for the one to his cage. "Whatever happened to the other Guardian of Immortality after you took over for him?"

"He still hangs around this pyramid," she said, unlocking his cage. "I see him every now and then on my rounds. Being a Guardian is apparently the only life he's known, so he can't return to the real world."

"You mean, he's still in this pyramid?" gasped Hermione as Jamie moved along to her cage.

"Yep."

"But, what if he tries to get us?"

"Oh, don't worry about that," said Jamie, unlocking her cage. "He's a weird guy."

Whenever he moves, he makes this really funny clicking noise, so I can tell when he's coming, and get out of the-"

Suddenly, the room filled with the most unusual noise. It was like the sound of a retractable pen being clicked up and down furiously, only a little softer. Like the clatter of a mouse gnawing on a cracker.

"Oh no..." groaned Jamie, looking quickly for the key to Ak's cage now. "We've got to get out of here now! He's coming, and he won't be too happy to see that I've let you go. We haven't had any visitors for a while and he won't want to see you five go to waste."

The clicking noise only got louder, and the more piercing it became, the more worried Jamie looked. She was furiously looking through the keys now, trying to find the right one. Finally, much longer than it would have taken her without the horrible noise all around her, she

opened up Ak's cage, just when the same door she had entered through opened once again, to reveal a most horrible monster.

It looked more like a centaur than a human, only except for being half horse, it was more like a half spider, with four black and hairy legs protruding out from either side. The human part of it was relatively the same, except where there should have been a mouth there was a set of mandibles, constantly clicking and seething a light green saliva, all in all being a very grotesque sight.

"Jamie..." it hissed through the clicking. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Just... getting ready to dispose of them," she said, trying to smile and nonchalantly moving over to Harry's cage with the keys behind her back, attempting to unlock his cage without arousing attention.

"It looks more like you're setting them free..." he hissed again, darting his larger than usual eyes around the room.

"No," said Jamie, shaking her head and fumbling for the correct key, even though she couldn't see which one was going to use. "I'm just..."

"You're just... what?" his asked again, coming closer to her.

"I'm just..." said Jamie, finding the right key and inserting it into the keyhole, unlocking Harry's cage. "Going to have some fun first."

"How so?" he asked, sounding intrigued.

"Instead of me killing them, I'm going to let them do my dirty work," said Jamie, trying to sound sinister. "I'll give them their wands back, and the last one alive gets to go free."

"An interesting twist," hissed the monster. "But, just to make sure your allegiance isn't wavering, I want you to do something first."

"What?"

"I want you to kill one of them."

Jamie glared at the monster and he glared back. Her wand, along with Harry's, Ron's, Hermione's, Malfoy's and Ak's, was sticking right out of her pocket, and her hand was floating right above it, ready to strike. Both of them started at each other, the terrible clicking continued. It appeared as though nothing was going to happen, when just then, Jamie made a move.

"Avada Kedavra!" she yelled, aiming right for the monster. But, just after the 'Avada' left her mouth, the monster extended one of his powerful arms out, and a green ray flew out, right at her wand and the ones in her pocket. The ray seemed to have a life of its own, sucking up each wand, and then squirming back, giving all six to the monster.

"Well well well," he hissed, glaring at Jamie. "It seems as though we have a mutiny on our hands here."

"Mutiny!?" yelled Jamie. "What are you talking about? I'm the only one in charge here; I'm the only Guardian! You gave the position to me!"

"You never truly stop being a Guardian," he murmured. "But... in your case, you will stop being one."

He walked over to the door that he entered through, crawling with his eight legs. He raised the hand that had no wands in it, made it into a fist... and brought it down right on the red button that was next to the door on the wall. It gave off a loud alarm and a voice came on that started speaking in Ancient Egyptian.

"What is it saying?" demanded Jamie. The monster grinned.

"It is saying that the entire pyramid, well, except for this room of course, is being flooded with gas."

"Gas? What's so bad about that?" asked Hermione.

“By itself, nothing really,” he smiled. He grabbed one of the wands from the six he had and made a small fire appear at the tip. “But, when combined with fire, it can make this entire pyramid explode.”

It took a second for this to sink in, but when it did, the reaction was immediate.

“We’ve got to get out of here!” yelled Jamie, running in the opposite direction of the monster. “He’s going to blow up Geb Pyramid!”

Harry decided to take this opportunity to start moving again and to get his Ring back. He turned his head in the direction of where he saw it fall when Jamie threw it down, but it wasn’t there. Harry fell to the ground, onto his knees, and began examining every stone, but there was no sign of it anywhere. It was as if it had just disappeared.

“Come on Harry!” yelled Ron above the laughing monster. The four of them were following Jamie out of the room through a door that she opened on the other side.

“No! Not now!” yelled Harry back to them, not wanting to do anything until the Ring was back on his finger.

“Come on!” groaned Malfoy, running over to Harry and grabbing him. “We’ve got to leave now!” He pulled on him with all of his strength and peeled Harry off of the ground, dragging him to the rest of the group.

“Oh no you don’t!” yelled the monster, turning his attention to the six of them. “You’re not leaving unpunished!” He pointed the wand that he used to summon the fire right at Harry, and shot it out at them again. The flame rushed at them, Harry closed his eyes, waiting for the fiery impact... but it never came. He opened his eyes up, to see why, and immediately saw the reason.

Malfoy had been hit instead. He let go of Harry, and was flailing his arms everywhere, now just a human-shaped ball of fire, screaming and rushing everywhere.

“Come on Harry!” yelled Hermione, Ron, Ak and Jamie together, sounding extremely serious and anxious. “We have to get out of here now!”

Harry turned to his flaming friend, but there was nothing he could do for him. Without his Ring on, he felt so weak, there was no chance he could transform and try to beat the monster. He had to run now and try something later.

The Ring... as soon as Harry thought of it, he couldn’t get it out of his head. Malfoy, the gas, fire, explosions... they all didn’t matter now. Harry had to find the Ring! It certainly wasn’t in here, he had already looked, maybe someone else picked it up!

Leaving Malfoy behind, Harry ran over to the rest of the group, entering the dark hall that lead out. As soon as he caught up with them, the smell of gas became overwhelming. Harry almost felt as though he was going to pass out, and since he didn’t have his wand, there wasn’t much he could do about it. He did the best thing he could by bringing up the top of his shirt over his mouth and nose.

“What are we going to do about Malfoy!?” demanded Hermione.

“We can’t leave him behind!” yelled Ak.

“But we can’t bring him with us either,” said Ron. “He’ll blow the whole place up the second he enters this hall.”

“I’ll take care of it,” said Harry, turning around for a second and walking back to the door that lead to the room. Malfoy was still there, on fire, but the monster was not. However, Harry didn’t have time to worry about the beast right now, Malfoy was getting closer to them and he had to stop him. Besides, he felt another force pulling him, telling him to run back with his friends as soon as possible....

Harry looked down, to the side of the door, and saw a big button, like the one that Jamie pressed to open the door. If he pressed it again, it would close, keeping them all safe from Malfoy.

“Sorry... friend,” sighed Harry, slamming a fist against the button. The primitive door, that was little more than a hole in the wall, instantly disappeared, along with any hope Malfoy had.

Not having anything more than survival and the Ring on his mind, Harry sprinted back to the group, not even thinking about what he had just done.

“What happened to Malfoy?” asked Hermione through her shirt.

“Don’t worry,” said Harry, constantly darting his eyes everywhere, scanning for any sign of the Ring. “He’ll be fine.”

“I know a secret passage out of here,” said Jamie who was at the head of the group, holding a cloth over her mouth. “Just follow me and we’ll be back to the main lobby soon enough. From there, we can send an alert throughout the rest of the pyramid.”

Not wanting to take their shirts off their mouths, no one said anything, only obeyed. It’s not as though they had much time to say anything, though, since they reached the next room only a few moments later.

“From here it’s only about a hundred more feet,” gasped Jamie. “We’ll be out of here in just a-”

Suddenly, there was an explosion in the wall, sending dirt, stone and dust everywhere. Harry looked up to see what caused it, and was not too happy when he saw what it was. The monster that had stolen their wands only minutes ago was now before them, blocking the only door out, all six wands in one hand, forming a superior magical device.

“Leaving so soon?” he hissed, grinning. He waved the wands in the air, making a long, thin string appear. Attached to one end was a red ball, one that didn’t look too nice. He tapped the end of the long string with his wand, and it began shrinking at a slow rate, getting closer and closer to the red ball.

“That’s a bomb!” yelled Hermione.

“What are you doing!?” demanded Jamie. “You’ll kill all of us!”

“My time is almost up as it is,” he sighed, bobbing the ball up and down in his hand. “If I’m going down, I’m taking this hellhole and all who dwell inside it with me!”

“You’re insane!” yelled Hermione, looking almost in tears.

“Yes, well, none of that will matter in a few moments... and besides, there’s nothing you can do about it, without your wands.”

As much as Harry hated to admit it, he was right. Jamie and Ak were useless without wands, and himself, Ron and Hermione were far too tired to transform. All they could do was wait, and hope for a miracle.

Just then, as if on command, there was another explosion in the room, this time, in the ceiling. After the dust and stone had settled, Harry covered his eyes and looked over, flabbergasted by what he saw.

It was Dede’ft! Only... he wasn’t looking too well. His eyes were massive and puffy all over, and his hide was now a swamp green. Also, his skin was literally crawling. Little bumps were moving all around in random directions all over.

“Whether you passed the tests or not!” he hissed, though only Harry could understand him. “I haven’t eaten for months and I... I... AAAHHH!”

The most disturbing sight ever to befoul Harry’s eyes suddenly came before him. The snake gave one last scream, and opened his mouth so wide, that his lips began to roll backwards

over his long, thick body, revealing his horrible insides. Only, there weren't any organs there anymore, just hundreds upon hundreds of tiny snakes that immediately flooded the room, demanding food.

“Food!”

“Food!”

“FOOD!”

“FOOD!” they all hissed, slithering over anyone and anything to get to their goals.

Fortunately, that goal didn't seem to be Harry or his companions, but rather the guardian that was still holding the bomb. Tiny snakes were slithering all over him, biting him everywhere and dragging him down to the ground. He threw the wands and the bomb into the air so he could use his hands to try and peel the snakes off of him.

Harry leapt for his wand: the next best thing to his Ring. In addition to his, he caught Ron and Hermione's, and Ak and Jamie caught theirs. Harry quickly tossed the wands to his friends; now they were back in control.

“Let's get out of here!” yelled Jamie, hopping over the snakes and towards the door, keeping a close eye on the bomb, whose fuse was now only about three feet long, and getting even shorter by the second.

But, just when the five of them began to cross over the slithering carpet below them, there was an abrupt eruption in the middle, something threw hundreds of snakes into the air from below, sending them in every which direction. Harry immediately looked over, to see what it was, and what was there could probably have not been much worse if it was Voldemort himself.

It was a fully grown werewolf, about four times the size of any of them, one hundred times stronger, and invincible to every spell Harry knew.

“You're telling me that old guardian was a werewolf too!” yelled Hermione, backing up and brandishing her wand, though it would do little good.

“Yeah,” gasped Jamie, backing up too. “I guess when Dede'ft made a hole in the ceiling, the moonlight came through, transforming him.”

“Who cares how he transformed!” yelled Ron. “All that matters is that he did and now we've got to stop him!” With that, Ron ran up to the werewolf that was in a killing rage, mutilating all the small snakes around him, turning them into a pulpy and bloody green and red mess.

“Stupefy!” yelled Ron, aiming right for the werewolf. The red spell came out and the beam hit him, but it did nothing. All it did was turn the attention of the monster away from the serpents to Ron. He gave an ear shattering growl, and leapt right at him.

“HOMORPHUS!” yelled Ak suddenly, waving his wand furiously in the air, as if drawing a picture. The strokes that he drew glowed a bright silver, revealing a circle with a star in the middle, and runes drawn at each star point. Evidently, he had been working on that spell for a while.

Each rune at every point gave off a different color and they each shot off their colored beam towards the center of the picture, making a single point of great energy. An orb of silver grew at that point, and from it a massive, silver beam erupted, aimed perfectly at the werewolf who had pinned himself over Ron, and was now scratching and biting his face and body all over. The beam blasted him right off of Ron and up against a wall, pushing on him with incredible amounts of pressure, enough to make him give a howl of pain, and create holes and cracks in the wall behind him.

Then, just as the werewolf gave another howl, the spell disappeared and he fell limp to the ground, right back into the pile of snakes that turned from eating their slaughtered brethren to the old, sleeping monster, the half spider half man one.

“Ak!” yelled Hermione. “How did you perform that spell! It’s the second most complex spell on Earth!”

“No time to explain!” yelled Ak, pointing at the bomb. “Look!”

Harry turned his head over to the bomb, and saw that the fuse was now little more than a foot long. If they wanted any chance of survival then they had to run now!

“Ron!” yelled Hermione, going over to him. He was a bloody mess all over, looking in about as good shape as Harry did after his encounter with Amemait. “Are you okay? Can you get up?”

“Yeah,” he managed to heave out, getting to his feet fairly quickly. “I can still move.”

“Alright, you guys head out!” yelled Jamie. “I’ll be right behind you!”

“No way!” yelled Ron. “You’re coming with us!”

“I will... I just have one thing that I have to do first.”

She ran over to the unconscious monster and ripped the beaded necklace off of her neck, creating a bright flash from her head. She quickly threw the necklace onto the beast’s neck, creating another flash.

“What was that all about?” asked Harry, keeping an eye on the bomb.

“That necklace was the reason I couldn’t leave this place,” said Jamie, signaling them to start running. “Whoever wears it can’t go past the exit. The only way to get it off is to immediately put it on someone else.”

“That’s nice but let’s go!” yelled a seriously bloodied and cut up Ron, jumping over the snakes and sprinting down the hallway. The other four quickly followed behind, knowing they didn’t have much time at all left.

“Harry!” heaved Jamie from behind. “One last thing....”

“What?” asked Harry, slowing down a bit.

“I want you to take this,” she said, giving him her Glove. “If Dumbledore sees me with it, he’ll try to take it. But, he won’t have a clue that you have it.”

“Dumbledore doesn’t want it,” sighed Harry, still not believing that she didn’t trust them. “But, I’ll take it anyway, to keep it safe.”

Harry took the Glove from her wand and stuffed it into his pocket, reminding him of how badly he wanted the Ring. The only way he could continue going was to constantly tell himself that maybe Dumbledore had it, or maybe it was in the lobby.

“We’re nearly there!” announced Jamie when the exit became visible. Harry could just picture the fuse in his head, probably no bigger than a few inches now. With that thought in mind, he ran even faster, as did the rest of them. Seconds later, they reached the main room.

“Harry! Ron! Hermione! Ak!” announced Dumbledore, who just happened to be right there, as if expecting them. “Ever since we smelt gas in the pyramid, we’ve been evacuating all the kids and you were among the ones missing!”

“There’s... a bomb...” choked Harry, out of breath. “We’ve got... to go... now!”

Dumbledore’s eyes widened.

“A bomb?”

“Yes!” yelled Jamie. “We’ve got to go now!”

“J- Jamie?” gasped Dumbledore, staring at her as if she were a ghost, which she must have been to him.

“We’ll explain later!” yelled Ron, grabbing Dumbledore by the arm. “But we have to get on the train!”

“What...?” asked Dumbledore, looking as if he were in a gaze from seeing Jamie. “Oh... yes! Train! Bomb! Gas! Let’s go now! Everyone, hold hands!”

The six of them quickly formed a circle, holding shaking and sweating hands. The world around them turned black and spun around, much faster than Harry would have expected or liked it. Dumbledore was probably Apparating in a hurry. Then, before another thought could pass Harry’s mind, the six of them were aboard the Hogwarts Express, along with the rest of the students.

“John!” yelled Dumbledore into the conductor’s room. “Get us out of here as soon as you can, if not sooner! The pyramid’s going to blow!”

“Can do, Mr. D,” he said back through the curtain that separated the driver’s chamber from the rest of the train. With that, the engine gave a lurch and began moving forwards at a rapid rate. But, traditional methods of moving would not get them to safety quickly enough, and the conductor must have known that, since a moment later the train heaved itself into the sky.

“Harry,” said Hermione quietly. “I think I found something that may belong to you.” Harry looked over at the hand she was holding up to him, and saw that on it, was his prized Ring. But, instead of thanking her, or anything of the sort like that, all Harry could say was,

“Give it to me!”

“I don’t know,” said Hermione sarcastically, with a trace of sincerity in her voice. She stroked the Ring. “I kind of like it....”

“Give it to me!” screamed Harry again, this time much louder.

“Fine!” said Hermione, ripping it off of her hand and offering it to him. Harry grabbed it out of her fingers and immediately slipped it on his. The effect was instant. Power flowed through his body like blood and he felt alive once more. Harry’s mind began to work again and he found himself finally being able to think outside of the Ring. The memories of what had happened flowed back to him.

“OH NO!” yelled Harry, getting back a memory that wasn’t too pleasant at all. “Malfoy is still in the pyramid!” He looked out the window at the night sky, with the full moon shining above the giant pyramid.

Just then, as if it wanted to mock Harry in its final moments of life and receive the last laugh, the Geb Pyramid exploded into a shower of fire and Stone.

Chapter 21- Voldemort Returns

It was almost beautiful, in an extremely sadistic and twisted sort of way. At first, the pyramid acted as though it were a volcano, with the top of it blowing up into the air and then fire and smoke billowing out of the top, with molten rock erupting from the inside and flowing out. But, as all that was going on, chunks of it were shooting off all over, plunging into the growing lake of melted stone around the base. Finally, after only a few moments of all this, the Geb Pyramid just gave up and let the whole thing detonate from the inside out, causing the whole structure to collapse on itself, making a massive cloud of smoke rise into the air above.

Throughout all this, Harry could only think of one thing: somewhere, in that cloud of dust or in the pile of ash and stone was Malfoy’s body. He shuddered at the thought. What had he done?

“My oh my...” sighed Dumbledore to himself, shaking his head slowly and looking out the window. “That’s going to take a lot of work to clean up. We’ll need to get memory wipers in here by the hundreds, and quickly too!”

“But... what about Malfoy?” asked Harry quietly, not daring to remove his eyes from the window.

“There is noting we can do for him,” heaved Dumbledore. “All we can do is honor his memory by trying to find his body and having a funeral.”

Harry wanted to so badly to beat himself up. How could he have been so... stupid, greedy, selfish, and everything else bad? He abandoned his friend and left him to die in a small room by himself... all for a Ring. It didn’t get much worse than that....

“This is all your fault!” screamed Harry in his mind, directing his thoughts to the Ring. “If it wasn’t for you, the horrible pyramid would have never been built, and Malfoy would be here with us right now!”

But, as hard as Harry tried to be angry at the Ring, he still had no desire to take it off. It was like a child who had done something bad. Harry was certainly angry at it for what it did, but was no closer to disowning it than he ever was or would be. For this, he hated it even more... and yet he didn’t.

“Well,” said Dumbledore, turning his attention to Jamie. “It appears that in the process this trip, we have both lost and gained a student.”

“Hello to you too, Headmaster,” said Jamie, faking a smile.

“Jamie,” said Dumbledore, still looking at her with amazement in his eyes, “how did you ever survive for so long in the pyramid by yourself? You were only a second year!”

“The necklace kept me alive,” she said, looking at Dumbledore distastefully. “As long as you wear it, you cannot be killed by old age or malnourishment. Of course, you still fell the pains of both. It has not been an easy eighteen years.”

“I can see,” said Dumbledore, eyeing her up and down. Harry looked at her again, literally in a new light. Now that they were out of the dark caverns of the pyramid and in the light of day, he could see just how bad she really looked. Her skin was no longer peach, but a dark brown, caked all over with mud. The little skin she had was barely enough to cover her body; Harry could see most of her bones. But, still the worst thing was the hair. There were grubs and a few other moving things inside it, which Harry guessed Jamie must have wanted. Those were probably her only source of food.

“But, I’m sure we’ll have plenty of time to hear all about those past years when we sit down with mom and dad and tell them that you’re okay!” said Ron happily, patting his older sister on the back.

“About that...” said Jamie slowly, removing her brother’s arm from her back. “Maybe we could wait a little while... until the end of the year perhaps, until we announce my existence to the rest of the family?”

“Why?” asked Ron.

“Because I don’t want to be alone when I see them for the first time. If you set up something not too conspicuous, like when we get back home to introduce me again, that would be much better. It would soften the blow for both parties.”

“That sounds good,” said Ron, though looking a little disappointed.

“And we shall all make sure not to tell anyone your little secret,” said Dumbledore, zipping up his lips. “Until you decide to show yourself, Jamie, I will allow you to stay at Hogwarts and assist Hagrid with his job.”

“Thank you Headmaster,” said Jamie, bowing slightly.

"Not a problem at all. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go organize the cleanup for the mess we just made, and figure out how in the hell I am going to explain this to the students."

With that, he stepped through the small crowd, and made his way to the private compartment again, where the rest of the teachers were already seated. He shut the door behind him and locked it tight.

"Now what do we do?" asked Ak, breaking the small silence.

"I know what you need to do, Jamie," said Ron, holding his nose. "For God's sake, take a shower!"

"But don't you like the smell of eighteen layers of muck, dirt, grime and bug skin all over my skin?" asked Jamie sarcastically. Everyone held their noses tight and shook their heads and she laughed. "Fine then. I'll see you back at the school."

She walked down the hallway to the end of the train, where there were the bathrooms. As she made her way each compartment, Harry heard many loud comments about the smell, and a few doors opening, to see what the source was.

"Oh my goodness!" exclaimed Madam Pomfrey suddenly when she saw Ron with his mangled face and body as she came by with her cart full of goodies. "My dear boy! You must come to my emergency room on the train now!"

She grabbed his arm, and ran down the hallway as well, to one of the final compartments. It had a white door, with a large red cross on it. She threw Ron inside and shut the door behind her. Even through the closed door at the back of the train, Harry could hear her yelling about how kids don't take 'flesh wounds' seriously enough nowadays.

"If you don't mind," said Ak, "I think I'll be off as well. I'm sure my friends were wondering where I am."

"Are you sure you wouldn't rather come with us?" asked Harry, wondering if now Ak qualified as a true friend. But, after what they just did, how could he not be?. "After all that we've been through?"

"And miss the chance to once again try and beat out Harry Potter by not saying that I defeated an Egyptian God and a werewolf when he failed?" asked Ak mockingly. "I hardly think so!"

"Fine," sighed Harry. "See you later, Ak."

"Well, where should we go?" asked Hermione when Ak arrived at his compartment. Harry wanted to say that they should go back to the remains of the pyramid, and help look for Malfoy, but he had to get over that. He had to save his sadness for the funeral....

"Why don't we go check on Ron," suggested Harry.

"Sounds like a good idea," responded Hermione. Harry could tell she was fighting to hold back her tears, and had been ever since the pyramid crumbled. Even though her and Malfoy had never been very close, Hermione still never liked it when anyone got hurt, and especially not when they got killed.

They made their way down the hall, hearing the occasional exclamation of how the pyramid just exploded like that. From what Harry heard in his few moments of listening, it seemed that everyone thought that the pyramid exploding had just been a show, a magical holograph. A cool way to end the first day of the trip. None of them believed or even thought for a second that it was real.

"What! NO!" Harry heard Ron yell through the hospital compartment. "No! It can't be true!"

Harry rushed inside, to see what was going on and saw Ron lying on the single bed in the small room, his hands covering his face. Madam Pomfrey was holding some sort of contraption in her hand. It was white and cylindrical and had a red dot at one end.

“What is it Ron!?” asked Harry, wondering what could have caused him to react like that. “What happened!?”

“I... I...” mumbled Ron incoherently through tears and his face.

“He was bitten by the werewolf,” sighed madam Pomfrey. “I’m afraid that your friend Ron now has its blood flowing in him, and is now one as well.”

“But I thought it just scratched you!” said Hermione.

“I thought so too,” said Ron, sitting up. “But, I guess I couldn’t tell the difference between its claws scratching me and its teeth biting me. They both hurt just as much.”

“Only the fangs are the ones that carry the magic,” said Madam Pomfrey. “If he had only scratched you, nothing would have happened. And, by the way, just how and where did you meet this werewolf?”

“Long story,” said Harry, shoving her off. How could Ron be a werewolf? This was too weird.... They were becoming just like his father’s old group of friends. They all were Animagi, and one of them was a werewolf. Harry hoped that there were no versions of Wormtail in their group.

“How am I ever going to lead a normal life?” demanded Ron. “I’m going to have to transform every month, just like Lupin... just like Lupin.... Great...! Just great, I’ll end up like Lupin; a poor, friendless loner. Just great....”

“Is there anything you can do for him?”

“Of course,” she said. “Once the magical blood was worked is way throughout him entirely, I will be able to perform the Homorphus Spell on him and return him to his human form permanently. But, that won’t be until after his first transformation, which will not be until around the end of June.”

“See Ron,” said Hermione, sitting down on the bed next to him. “There is hope.”

“Yeah,” added Harry, “and until then, you’ll be invincible to almost every spell that there is! Think of the possibilities....”

“Hmm,” sniveled Ron. “I guess you’re right. Being a werewolf for a month may have a few advantages.”

“That’s the spirit!” said Hermione, hitting him on the back.

“Can we take him back to out normal compartment?” asked Harry. “Or does he need to say here?”

“Oh, I managed to fix those gashes and everything already. He is free to go.”

“Alright,” said Harry. “Come on Ron... Hermione. Let’s go back to our compartment and wait until we get back to Hogwarts.”

“Okay,” said Ron, looking as though he was over his little trauma. He bounced off the bed and hopped right up next to his two friends, looking as happy as he usually did, which was often far too much. They thanked Madam Pomfrey, and let her return to her duty of selling food, while they returned to their compartment. When the door opened, Cho and Ginny were already inside, sitting down and waiting.

“There you are!” said Ginny.

“Where have you been?” asked Cho.

“And where’s Draco?” asked Ginny, peering all around them. Harry, along with Hermione and Ron, heaved a great sigh and collapsed into the available seats. With Ginny

looking at them in a confused way, Harry took a deep breath, and told her what happened, right from the beginning.

It was the worst trip ever on the Hogwarts Express Harry had ever been on. Once Harry finished his explanation, Ginny asked once again where Draco was, with a rather blank expression on her face. Just as she did, Dumbledore came over the speakers, and gave the grim announcement that the explosion had not been fake, but very real.

As soon as he stopped explaining, a sort of panic broke out on the entire train. Ginny burst into tears and all the prefects were called upon to settle down their house's younger students. Harry had to grab Joe the second before he jumped out the window with no magical parachute on this time, and took Mike's marker away, before he wrote 'We're All Going To Die!' in Japanese all over the train.

Once Harry calmed them down, he returned to his compartment where Hermione was gone, tending to the girls, and Cho and Ron were trying to comfort the traumatized and heartbroken Ginny.

"It's just... not... fair," she said spastically through her flooding tears, sounding as if she was going to hyperventilate.

"I know, I know," comforted Cho, stroking her hair. "It'll be okay...."

It went on like that for the entire two hour ride. Hermione never came back, and Harry had to constantly patrol the halls, taking care of some students that we're going crazy, saying they could have died, the ones that the other prefects were too busy to watch. Harry breathed a huge sigh of relief when it all was finally over, and the train pulled into the Hogwarts station.

"Come on," sighed Cho, heaving Ginny up onto her shoulder. She had cried herself into exhaustion, and looked as though she may collapse at any given time. Her face was about the same color as her hair, as were her eyes. "Let's get you to the school, come on."

"Thanks for helping, Cho," said Harry, happy that he at least didn't have to deal with the mourning Ginny.

"No problem," she whispered back. "But I think this one is going to need some serious counseling."

"I don't doubt that," said Harry, watching Cho carry Ginny off the train. Though, he thought, he might want to sign up for a little mental help himself. No one that he personally, really knew had ever died when he was old enough to actually understand what death meant. Harry didn't know if he were in shock right now from it, but if he was, he hoped he would stay like that, so he wouldn't have to deal with it. He didn't want to accept that fact that Malfoy had died.

Just last year, Malfoy's death would have affected Harry, but in a different way. Over the past year, he had grown to appreciate Malfoy as a person, an actual human being; and not a bad one at that. He was funny, kind, intelligent, serious when he had to be, and meant a lot to many people.

And now he was gone.

Harry shuddered and stepped off the train with the teachers, all the students had already gotten off. He held himself tight. It was so much colder here than in Egypt, very much. Even more so since it was very late at night, almost early morning.

His teeth chattering, Harry walked up to the main entrance, along with the hundreds of other students, most of which didn't look too much better than Harry. Dumbledore quickly walked by them, and threw open the doors. The entire mass of students ran inside, trying to get warm.

“Everyone to the Great Hall!” announced Dumbledore, magnifying his voice so everyone could hear him. “I have a very quick announcement!”

The whole throng of kids first groaned, then turned, rather than going straight, into a dark Great Hall. The professors flew in above them and quickly lit all of the lights, brightening it up so that everyone could take their seats. With a yawn, Harry sat down at the Gryffindor table.

“I’m sorry to repeat this,” announced Dumbledore, speaking as he walked up to the front, “but, as you know, the Geb Pyramid is gone. We were that last group there, and we are the last group to ever see it. The team of wizards that was sent there to do whatever they could confirmed that it is far beyond repair. However, no Muggles saw it, and no bodies have been found.”

With that last statement, he turned to Harry’s direction and gave a frown. Harry nodded his hand in understanding. Malfoy’s body had been disintegrated by the fire, then the crumbling rocks. What a way to go... he wondered if Dumbledore was going to say anything about him.

“Tomorrow, I will continue with a few more announcements about the pyramid,” he said, lowering his voice slightly, answering Harry’s question. “But, for now, I encourage you all to go to bed, and get a good night’s sleep. You will need it after what happened.... Once again, I am deeply sorry that your field trip was cut short, but that is no excuse not to get a good night’s sleep. So, off you go!”

The student body once again sat up and walked off to their common rooms. Harry didn’t bother to seek out Ron or Hermione, he was far too tired. All he wanted to do was collapse into bed, and when he got to his dormitory, that’s exactly what he did.

“Harry!” yelled Ron when he came in. “How can you sleep at a time like this? Ginny’s a mess, Malfoy is dead, and-”

“Ron,” mumbled Harry, not moving an inch. “Please, just shut up.”

“Harry...”

“Oh Ron,” mumbled Harry, turning over. “Not now, I don’t want to talk about what happened now!”

“Harry Potter...”

“What?”

“Harry...”

“Ron!” yelled Harry, sitting up and opening his eyes. “Will you stop doing that? Can’t you see that I am tired? T-I-R-E-D spells tired! Aren’t you feeling the same way after we passed the hero’s-”

Harry stopped right in the middle of his thought. Instead of Ron peering over him, waking him up like he usually did, Voldemort, in all of his horrible glory, was standing there instead.

Chapter 22- The Headmaster’s Room

“Hello Harry,” greeted Voldemort through a thin smile, as if they were old friends.

“We have to stop meeting like this,” said Harry, looking around. He was in a rather large room that he had never been in before, and had probably never been in there for good reason. All around him were old statues, stacked on top of each other and thrown in random places, both large and small, with cobwebs all over them.

“Aren’t they wonderful?” asked Voldemort, moving his arms in the direction of all of the statues. “They’re sculptures of previous headmasters, you know; the greatest headmasters that Hogwarts had ever had.”

“I don’t see Dumbledore anywhere,” spat Harry.

“Humph,” he groaned. “This room is reserved for the immortalized versions of only the headmasters that are far to great to be within a fifty mile radius of that old buffoon. These statues here are of the many headmasters that have tried to turn Hogwarts into a school for the Dark Arts, but failed in their valiant efforts. Apparently, Dumbledore doesn’t think you children should see them.”

“What do you want,” hissed Harry. He had been through this before and knew that the Voldemort in front of him wasn’t real, just a holographic version, a dream, like the time he was in the common room with him.

“I think we both know what it is I want,” he murmured, glaring straight at Harry.

“No, do tell me,” said Harry mockingly.

“I want the Glove!” he yelled, looking furious.

“Why didn’t you just get it yourself at the pyramid?”

“I tried,” sighed Voldemort. “I told the previous guardian to try and get it from you, after he had exterminated you six. But, of course, he failed.”

“I’m not going to give it to you,” said Harry sternly, patting his pocket to make sure it was still in there. “You can torture me all you like, there’s no way. I know that you already have at least one Item, and there’s no way I’m giving you this one.”

“Very well then Harry,” laughed Voldemort. “Very well. I see that you are you are a man of business, Harry. So, I suppose, I will just have to give you a little bit more... incentive.”

“Like what?” asked Harry curiously. But, Voldemort just grinned and tapped himself with his wand, disappearing into thin air and leaving Harry all alone in the dark, creepy, windowless room.

“Great, now what?” Harry asked himself, looking around. He was wandless, had no illumination, and did not know where he was. Harry scanned the room, for any source of light that would lead him out.

Then he saw it. Right above an especially large statue with six arm, positioned almost like a perfect ladder for Harry to climb up and out with, was a hole leading out of the room. He walked up to the horrifying statue. It displayed the six armed man, with one leg on top of a skull and the other on top of a screaming head. The man was grinning, with an eyeball dripping from his mouth. Harry shivered and climbed up his arms, wishing that he could have just had a normal night like everyone else. But no! He had to have a conversation with Voldemort.

Harry peered his head through the hole in the ceiling, to see where he was. It was a fairly normal looking hallway, though one Harry had never been in this one before. Instead of being the usual vibrant colors, it was rather old and looked in bad shape. How much of this school had he never been in before?

Harry climbed out of the hole and stood up to look around. The hall looked exactly like a normal one, only much older and decrepit. Harry brushed himself off and began walking down it, hoping he would arrive at familiar territory soon, before Voldemort, or any version of him for that matter, came back.

“AAAHHH!” yelled Harry. Apparently, this hall was older than he thought it was. His leg went right through the floor, creating an awfully loud noise and making Harry stuck between two stories. He was all alone, trapped in the middle of somewhere he’d never seen before, and Voldemort could appear at any time and kill him. This situation could not get much worse.

“Meow...” came a soft cat voice. Harry stopped trying to pull his leg out of the hole for a moment and looked straight ahead. Before him was Miss. Norris, Filch’s cat. Wherever she was, Filch would soon be, reprimanding severely whoever happened to be there at the time, which would be Harry in this case. He had to get out of there... now!

“Did you find someone?” Harry heard Filch say from not from too far away. Any minute now, he could see Harry... and what would his excuse be? That Voldemort summoned him down here? Filch was going to see him any moment....

“That’s it!” said Harry to himself. “If he can’t see me, than I won’t get in trouble! Thank you Sirius!” Harry remembered that he had the Animagus Invisibility Ring on and quickly transformed into his gryffin form, becoming completely invisible just as Filch appeared at the end of the hallway with his lit lantern in hand.

“Do you see someone?” asked Filch to his cat again. “Not very likely that any student would be down here....”

He kept walking closer to Harry, moving quite slowly, as if checking every inch before he took a step. The ring may make Harry invisible, but it didn’t make it possible for people to walk through him! Unless he got out of the hole quick, Filch was going to bump into him and find out he was there.

Harry flapped his gryffin wings as hard as he could, though not hard enough to make any noise, to try and pull himself out. It was even harder in his Gryffin form, since the wings were not the strong part of the body, the arms were; those were what gave the initial push off of the ground. It was like trying to lift a barbell with your pinky.

“I don’t see anyone...” whispered Filch, still getting closer. He was only a few feet away from Harry. He had to get out of the hole now!

Harry put all the energy he had into one final, massive flap of his wings. That brought him right out of the hole and onto the ground nearby. He tried to be as quiet as he could about it, but a few noises were inescapable. Filch must have heard those, for it seemed that he began to walk faster, and looking even more furious.

“I know there’s someone here,” he mumbled. “He’s probably got one of those blasted invisibility cloaks on... I’ll get those banned next year.”

Harry kept backing up, to try and get out of the way of the rampaging Filch. Miss. Norris was quickly pacing back in forth in front of him, so he couldn’t risk trying to run past. He just had to hope that he didn’t run out of hallway to back up in soon.

“Blast it!” yelled Filch, stopping where he was. “We must have lost him by now. Come on Norris, if we hurry we can still get him before he gets back to the Main Hallway!”

With that, Filch and Miss. Norris sprinted down the hallway in the opposite direction of Harry, and out of view very quickly. Harry breathed a huge sigh of relief and transformed out of his gryffin form. He spun around, to keep going, and then took a step forward... and fell into a hole.

“Woah!” yelled Harry, then covering his mouth up quickly so that Filch wouldn’t hear him. The hole took up the entire width of the end of the hall and was fairly deep. Harry fell for several seconds before he hit the damp ground, getting wet all over.

“Oh no,” sighed Harry, looking up at the very far away hole that he fell through. He was far too tired to transform again, much less fly all the way back up and expect to keep walking the rest of the way back to the common room. He hoped that wherever he landed had an exit. “Now where am I?”

Harry looked around, and was surprised at what he saw. It was a fairly small area that looked like a Muggle security room. All over the four walls were small television-like screens,

depicting every single room in Hogwarts. Each was in perfect color and had a small label below, telling what each room was. Hanging from the ceiling of the room in the center was a sign that read "The Headmaster's Room".

"So it's true," said Harry, in awe of what he was seeing. "Dumbledore really does know everything that goes on in this place! He can see any room in the entire castle whenever he wants!"

Harry gazed at the walls of screens, in awe of what he was seeing. With this, he could spy on anyone at anytime, no one would ever have any privacy anymore as long as someone was in this room. He saw Ron and Ak asleep in their beds, Hermione reading by wand-light in her dark dorm, the house elves busy preparing tomorrow's breakfast.... The possibilities of a room like this were endless....

"But," Harry thought, suddenly realizing that all these screens applied to him as well, "Dumbledore can see whatever I'm doing. That means he may know that we have the Items! Or worse, he knows whenever we sneak out at night, and what we do. We've got to be more careful in what we do around here... we could be expelled! Though, I suppose, if Dumbledore was going to expel us, he would have done it long ago."

Trying to stop worrying, Harry once again looked at all the screen. Most of them were showing students asleep in their dormitories, teachers asleep in their offices, and the rest depicted dark and empty rooms... except for one. Only one of the screens was not almost totally dark, and Harry moved in closer to it, to see what was on it.

It was showing two people talking in an office that looked very familiar, though so little of it was shown, Harry couldn't quite make out which one it was. He looked below the screen and saw the label. It read, 'Headmaster's Office'. Harry turned his attention back to the screen, and suddenly saw who the two people were! Dumbledore and Quirrell!

"-he is very close," whispered Quirrell, so softly Harry had to really lean into the screen to head. "You-Know-Who already has one, and I think he could even have two by now. If he gets the others, then we're all doomed!"

"Oh no," whispered. So it was true! Voldemort did have one of the Items already, and Quirrell believed that he could even have more. Harry tried to figure out how that all worked out: he had the Glove and the Ring, Hermione had the Bracelet, and Professor McGonagall gave the Stone to Dumbledore, so Voldemort must have... the Watch! He stole it from Dumbledore somehow! But, what other one did he have?

"I know," sighed Dumbledore. "I know. He is very close to the others as well, we must begin to use more forceful and blatant tactics. It is the only way."

"Of course," said Quirrell. "Let us call a meeting tomorrow, we shall figure out everything then."

"Alright," said Dumbledore, yawning a little. "We shall. Tomorrow then, Jerry."

"Yes," he said, opening the door and leaving. "See you later."

With that, he stepped out of the office and shut the door, walking down the steps. Harry saw Dumbledore give one last sigh and then open the door to his bedroom, disappearing from the view on the screen.

"Dumbledore must know about my little nighttime meetings with Voldemort," said Harry to himself. "He knows that he is close to getting the other Items, and I know it too. If things get any worse, I'll have to give him the rest; just to ensure the world's safety. But, first, I need to go to sleep."

Harry quickly turned his head around, trying to find a door out, and saw none on the walls. But, in the middle of the room below the sign, there was another hole with a ladder going down. Harry jumped into it and began climbing.

It was a fairly short trip down, and the ground Harry landed on felt like damp dirt. It was extremely dark as well, so much Harry had to use up what little energy he had left to transform his eyes, just so he would be able to see where he was going. If only he had his wand instead...

But, just like the ladder, the hallway was not very long. Harry quickly reached the end and found himself at a three-way fork in the road, with each path having a sign above the entrance, telling where it went.

“Headmaster,” read Harry off of the sign above the one he had just exited from. He turned to the other three. “Death and Main Corridor.... Hey! I’ve been here before! This is that secret passage I found when the staircases changed.”

Happy that at least he was now back in somewhat familiar territory, Harry grinned to himself and went down the Main Corridor path, not wanting to go down the Death path, the one he just got out of, or the one that led him to this fork last time, unless the staircases were acting up again.

Harry ran down the corridor, wanting to get back to his nice, warm bed and let everything that had happened in the past hour or so sink in and stop buzzing around in his mind. He quickly appeared back in the Main Hallway, stepping through the invisible one-way door in the wall like last time.

“There you are!” yelled Filch suddenly, seeing Harry pop out from the wall. “I knew it was someone with an Invisibility Cloak! Probably the one you got from your father, eh Potter?”

“Filch?” gasped Harry, amazed that after all he had done, Filch had actually gotten him. Both he and Miss. Norris were wearing the same expression, a smile that only a prize catch could bring.

“You’re lucky the headmaster’s asleep,” grinned Filch, grabbing Harry by the ear. “He’s usually the one to deal out my punishments, but since I don’t want to disturb him while he’s asleep, I think I’ll just- WHAT?”

Harry, not wanting to hear what horrible task Filch had cooked up for him, used every last ounce of energy in his body to transform fully, turning into the gryffin and becoming invisible. Harry collapsed right onto the ground.

“What the hell!” yelled Filch, looking up and down the hallway. “I could have sworn I saw Potter here a second ago! But, he just... disappeared. He didn’t have his Invisibility Cloak with him anywhere I could see... eh, Miss Norris?”

“Meow,” she hissed, staring at Harry who was breathing hard and laying down on the ground. She and she alone knew that he was still there.

“It’s late,” said Filch, shaking his head. “My eyes must be playing tricks on me. I’ll continue the search tomorrow. Come on!”

Miss. Norris hissed at Harry one last time, knowing he was getting away with something when he shouldn’t be, and then ran off to her master, glancing back at Harry every few seconds, still smelling him. When they were well out of hearing range, Harry collapsed back into his human form, feeling more tired than he had ever in his life.

“Need... to get... to bed....” Harry managed to gasp out, an instant before he fell asleep right there in front of the Great Hall.

“Harry! Get up!” came a shrill voice belonging to Hermione. She poked him with her wand a few times, making Harry grumble, groan, and turn over. “You’ve been out here all night!”

“I know...” sighed Harry, rubbing his eyes. All around him, sunlight was flooding in through the windows and Harry had to cover his eyes from being blinded. His body ached all over from sleeping on the hard ground and he felt as though there was still glue all over his eyelids.

“I heard that you were down here from a few early comers to breakfast,” explained Hermione, helping Harry back up onto his feet. “You’re lucky no one’s stepped on you or told one of the professors.”

“I would have been luckier if I had made it back to my bed,” sighed Harry.

“Come on then!” said Hermione, helping him up. “Let’s go to breakfast.”

“That sounds like a good idea!” said Harry, suddenly feeling much more hungry than tired. He jumped up, right next to Hermione.

“Why were you out here anyway?” she asked him as they sat down at the Gryffindor table, with most of the rest of the school already there. “Did you and Cho have an exhausting date or something?”

“No,” said Harry, letting all the memories of what happened last night flow back into his mind. “You see, it was-”

“Attention students!” said Dumbledore just then, interrupting Harry and Hermione. “As I said last night, I have a few more announcements about the trip.”

“Oh no, he’s going to announce that Malfoy died,” cringed Harry.

“I am extremely sorry to say,” said Dumbledore, shaking his head, “that while most of the school was able to evacuate the pyramid in time, not every was so lucky. I am afraid to say that one of our students did not make it back alive. This morning, I want us all to lift our glasses to-”

There was a massive, explosive noise just then: the sound of the Great Hall doors being thrown open. Everyone in the room swung their heads over and Harry held his head to keep himself from screaming out loud.

It was Malfoy.

Chapter 23- Ransom

Into the room Malfoy limped, his left leg being of no more use than an anvil as he dragged it behind him. Malfoy’s condition looked far worse than what Harry’s did after his encounter with Amemait and Ron’s werewolf attack combined. His entire body was covered from head to toe in ash, blood, burnt skin, and little chunks of stone. The few clothes that he still had on were little more than rags, and it was as though just looking at them was enough weight to make them fall right off. It was a miracle- no, a phenomenon that he survived.

“Will someone get the nurse in here... NOW!” yelled Dumbledore, breaking the uneasy silence that plagued the Hall as Malfoy slowly worked his way down the center aisle, an expression of blankness on his mangled face.

Immediately, a dozen or so students from assorted houses ran off as fast as they could to the Hospital Wing to get madam Pomfrey while the rest just stayed there, in awe of what was before them. Malfoy didn’t look as though he was in good enough condition to be living right now, much less walking.

Almost as soon as the students ran out to get her, Madam Pomfrey came bouncing into the Hall, quickly scooping Malfoy up onto a stretcher that a house elf was bringing up behind her.

“My my my!” she said quietly as she lifted him up. “What has happened to you?”

“Pyramid... go... boom...” groaned Malfoy, clutching his sides as she wheeled him out of the Hall, shutting the gigantic doors behind her and leaving behind the most unpleasant silence that Harry had ever experienced. Everyone in the Hall turned their speechless faces to Dumbledore, waiting for and wanting him to say something.

“Well then...” he finally continued, looking in just about as much shock as they did.

“May we thank the day that we did not have to raise our glasses to our fellow student Draco after all, but rather our heads to see him walk in the Hall!”

“What happened to him!?” demanded a random student, breaking the tension in the room. All of a sudden, everyone starting yelling and rambling on about what just happened, demanding various pieces of information.

“How did he get hurt so bad!?”

“Did he go in the Forbidden Forest!?”

“He said something about the Pyramid....”

“Was he left behind!?”

“SILENCE!” yelled Dumbledore, giving off an aura of power that did not require words to make everyone be quiet. The Hall became as silent as when Malfoy walked in. “Now,” he continued, much more calmly, “Mr. Malfoy’s injuries may have looked bad, but I can assure you that they are nothing that Madam Pomfrey can’t fix. I have seen much worse been healed in no time. If any of you are concerned about him still, you may visit him. Once he is better, he will be able to give you a count of what happened to him much better than I could. Also, I’m sure I don’t have to remind you all that this is still a school day, so despite what has just happened, you are all still required to go to class, and try to do well.”

The silence continued, everyone was still staring at him blankly.

“You may go to classes now.”

All of the students in the room scrambled up and the food on the tables disappeared with them, some shoving a few things for later into their pockets and mouths, others just leaving it there for the magic to take place.

“Let’s go check on Malfoy quickly,” said Harry as they stood up. “And find out how the heck he got back here!”

“That’s what I want to know,” said Hermione, looking as though she was thinking hard, trying to find some sort of logical way in her mind that Malfoy could have gotten back alive, but was unable to.

They ran away from the chaotic crowd and out of the room, sprinting all the way up to the Hospital Wing, wanting to see Malfoy before classes started.

"No visitors right now!" yelled Madam Pomfrey when they reached the room. She was putting up the sheet around Malfoy's bed, cutting him off from view. Not letting them get another word in, she pushed them out of the room hurriedly, wanting to return to her patient.

"Don't worry," said Harry when they suddenly found themselves out of the room. "I'll find out what happened." He morphed quickly into the gryffin and nudged the door open, ever so slightly so that he could just slip through without arousing any attention.

"Now you just stay put," said Madam Pomfrey to Malfoy as he laid down on his bed. "I need to run down to Professor Snape's office and get a few ingredients for a potion to grow you a new kidney. I'll be right back."

"Okay..." gasped Malfoy as she exited, walking right by Harry, almost bumping into his fury form. Once she was out, Harry walked on all fours over to his mutilated friend.

"Malfoy..." said Harry, transforming back.

"Potter?" he asked, sounding better. "Is that you?"

"In the fur... well, now in the flesh," he said. "What happened to you?"

"I managed to escape," said Malfoy bitterly, not looking at Harry.

"Well I know that," retorted Harry with the same tone of voice. "But how?"

"Well, after you left me to die in the room with that monster," spat Malfoy. "I was able to put myself out by rolling on the floor and rubbing some dirt all over me. After I was fully put out, I opened the same door you went through and worked myself to room full of snakes where I found my wand. Then I ran down the hall leading to the lobby and looked out the door. I saw the Hogwarts Express in the air, leaving without me, and a second later, the whole pyramid just collapsed on me, bringing me to the condition I am currently in."

"But how did you manage to get all the way back here, in only a day?"

"I Apparated of course," said Malfoy lazily, still not making eye contact.

"What did you say?" asked Harry, obviously misunderstanding Malfoy.

"I said I Apparated," said Malfoy louder and more sternly this time.

"But how..." Harry managed to get out through his amazed mind. "How could you possibly be able to Apparate? I mean... it's illegal!"

"After some of the things I've done," said Malfoy, "learning to Apparate was nothing. Beside, it's not nearly as hard as people make it out to be."

"What do you mean after the things you've done it was nothing?" asked Harry curiously.
"What else have you done?"

Malfoy sighed and finally turned to face him. He sat up in the bed and pulled back the sleeve on one of his arms. There, right below the wrist was the Dark Mark, the sign that all Death Eater's bore.

"You're a Death Eater?" asked Harry, not taking his eyes off of the mark.

"Have been ever since I was thirteen," said Draco, pulling his sleeve back down. "That's the age of initiation. How else do you think I've been taught and given so much? Been told so much information? Trainees aren't allowed any of that."

"So what have you done?" asked Harry, amazed at both the fact that Malfoy was a Death Eater and that he hadn't realized it earlier.

"Can't say," said Malfoy, lying back down and turning his head to the side again. "It's time for you to go."

"Not quite yet, I still..."

Suddenly, the bell rang, signaling that classes were starting and Harry had to run out of there now if he didn't want to meet an irate McGonagall first thing in the morning.

"I'll see you later then, Malfoy," said Harry, transforming into his gryffin form.

Malfoy didn't answer.

Harry walked over to the door on all fours, trying to be as swift as possible, but just as he was about to walk back through, Madam Pomfrey appeared before him, carrying a pile of odd items in her hands. They looked like dried leaves, only bigger and yellow.

Harry froze right where he was.

"Oh! Madam Pomfrey!" yelled Malfoy suddenly. "There's something there on the floor there on the left next to you!"

"What?" she asked, turning to her side where Harry was. "Oh my! you're right! There is a spot on the floor."

She reached down with her hand, right to where Harry was in his gryffin form, ready to pick up some large wad of dust that Harry was just so unfortunate to have stopped on. Once he felt her hand coming into contact with his fur, he knew it was all over.

"AIEE!" jumping back in surprise as she shrieked from the shock of touching something when there should have just been air. "What is that!?"

"It was me," sighed Harry, turning back into his human form. The door was shut, she was standing in front of it. Surrender was the only way out.

"Harry!" she yelled, catching her breath. "What do you think you're still doing in here? I told you no more visitors and classes just started!"

"It's just the way Potter's mind works... backwards and then upside down," laughed Malfoy from his bed, grinning. Harry eyed him curiously. He was back to the old Malfoy now. Harry had done the most horrible thing one friend could possibly do to another; he murdered their trust and left him to die alone the most horrible death imaginable. And, possibly worst of all, he didn't even apologize to him. Now that he thought about it, Harry didn't really blame him.

"Well you're lucky I'm in a hurry," she said, dumping the ingredients in her arms into a massive pot. "I don't have the time to write you up a detention slip."

"Thank you," said Harry, looking at Malfoy. The more he gazed at him, the more he saw that he had changed very much. The evilness within was seeping out again.

"I'm not being nice, I'm being busy," said Madam Pomfrey, not looking at Harry and throwing this and that into the pot. "Now run along! Quickly now! You're late enough or class as it is!"

"Yes, Madam Pomfrey," said Harry quickly, slipping out the door. He had a feeling that his and Malfoy's friendship was over. Preferring to be unprepared for class, rather than later than he already was, Harry sprinted to Transfiguration, almost fifteen minutes late.

"Mr. Potter!" Professor McGonagall screeched at him when Harry appeared in the room. "You are unreasonably late!"

"Sorry, professor," said Harry. "I was visiting... an old friend."

"I don't want excuses, I want you to be here on time," she retorted as Harry took his seat. "That will be fifteen points from Gryffindor, one for each minute."

"Why are you so late?" whispered Hermione to him when Professor McGonagall returned her attention to teaching rather than Harry. "I waited until the last bell rang then I ran out of there."

"Malfoy is the reason I'm late," said Harry bitterly.

"Did you two talk for a while?"

"Not really...."

"Then why did it take you so long to get here?"

"He got me in trouble."

“Malfoy?” asked Hermione, sounding surprised. “But I thought you two were friends now.”

“Not anymore,” sighed Harry. “Not anymore....”

“Hey,” whispered Hermione a few minutes later. “Have you seen Ron anywhere?”

“What?” asked Harry, turning his head all around, expecting to see the red-haired boy next to him. “No, I thought he was right here, next to me.”

“Me too,” said Hermione, looking around again. “Did you see him this morning?”

“No,” said Harry, realizing now that he hadn’t seen Ron all day.

“He didn’t look sick last night or anything....”

“And I didn’t see him in the Hospital Wing if he was anyway.”

“Where on earth is he then?” asked Hermione one final time.

“I don’t know,” said Harry, beginning to feel a little bit worried. He knew very well how he could find him: if he just went to the Headmaster’s Room, the one with screens showing everything in every room in the entire castle. But, if he went in that room and Dumbledore happened to be there first, that could definitely lead to some awkward situations and questions.

“Let’s just keep an eye out for him for the continuation of the day,” said Hermione.

“Alright.”

But, throughout the rest of the day and the rest of the classes, Ron made no appearance. Not even at his favorite time of the day, lunch, was he there. It was as if he just disappeared from Hogwarts.

“Should we ask a teacher?” suggested Hermione when the day was over and everyone was heading back to their common rooms.

“Not just yet,” said Harry, remembering his idea of checking the Headmaster’s room. “I have a better idea.”

“Can we just check your room, one last time?” she asked when they stepped into the Gryffindor room.

“Why?” asked Harry.

“Just to make sure he hasn’t been there all day, sleeping or something. Trying to give us a good scare.”

“Fine,” Harry said, actually thinking that was a reasonable suggestion. This was the type of thing Ron may have done for fun. They ran up to the fifth year boys’ room and threw open the door, seeing what they had pretty much expected.

“Nope,” said Harry. “No Rons are in here.”

“Wait just a second,” said Hermione, stepping in. “What’s that?”

“What?”

“That!” she said, pointing to Ron’s bed. Harry turned, and saw on his pillow a small note, written on a torn piece of parchment. Harry walked over to it and read it off. It was written in extremely beautiful handwriting in red ink that dripped ever so slightly, giving the smallest appearance of blood trickling down.

“To Harry Potter,” Harry read it off quietly, trying to make out the highly stylized letters. “If you ever want to see your friend Ron again then you know what to do.”

“What is it?” asked Hermione.

“It’s a ransom note,” said Harry, lowering it down. “Voldemort has Ron.”

“What do you mean?” demanded Hermione, her voice lowered. “How do you know that? Let’s check the map.”

“Good idea,” said Harry quickly, wondering why they hadn’t done that in the first place. He opened up his drawer and took out the Marauder’s Map, the map created by his father and his three friends in their time at Hogwarts. It showed every secret passage and location of the entire school as well as where everyone currently was.

Harry scanned the map for a dot labeled Ron, but found none.

“He’s not on here,” he sighed, folding the map up and putting it away into his drawer. “Voldemort has probably taken him away. In exchange for Ron, he wants the Glove.”

“How do you know that?” asked Hermione again.

“Voldemort visited me in some sort of holographic form the other day,” said Harry. “He told me that he wanted the Glove. Somehow, he knows we have it.”

“Well what are we going to do?” asked Hermione. “We can’t give it to him.”

“No we can’t,” said Harry, trying to think of what their options were. Evidently, they were not doing a very good job of keeping the Items secure. One of them had already been stolen and now they were in a horrible situation regarding another. They had to somehow change this.

“We have to give it to Dumbledore,” said Harry finally. “He’ll know what to do with it and he can keep it safe.”

“It’s all we can do,” said Hermione, looking very concerned and anxious.

“Let’s get there as fast as we can,” said Harry, stuffing the ransom note in his pocket. “Every second we waste is another second that Ron is in danger.”

With that, they sprinted out of the dorm and common room, evading people’s questions as to why Hermione was in the boy’s dormitory. Right now, Harry didn’t care what horrible rumors they cooked up; all he wanted was to find his best friend.

“Monkey cakes,” gasped Harry, out of breath, to the gargoyle guarding Dumbledore’s room. It moved out of the way and the two of them ran up the stairs and threw open the door.

“Professor Dumbledore!” yelled Harry when they entered his office. He was sitting right behind his desk and nearly jumped a foot in the air from surprise, throwing papers, quills and bottles of ink as well.

“Oh my!” he gasped. “Harry! Miss. Granger! What is it?”

“Someone’s taken Ron!” whimpered Hermione.

“And we think it’s Voldemort,” added Harry, catching his breath.

“What makes you think that?” asked Dumbledore, standing up in his pile of clutter, the surprise immediately fading from his face and transforming into an expression of urgency and seriousness.

“Because he wants this,” said Harry, ripping the magnificent Glove out of his pocket and presenting it to Dumbledore. Before him, it shone like a pile of rubies, as bright as the sun, lighting up the room.

Dumbledore’s eyes widened.

“Do you... know what... that is?” he asked slowly, not taking his bulging eyes off of the brilliant Glove.

“Yes, and we’ve known for a long time,” sighed Hermione.

“It’s one of the three Legendary Items,” said Harry, setting it down on his desk. Dumbledore’s eyes followed it all the way.

“How do you know that Voldemort wants it?” he asked them, very slowly.

“He’s told me... twice,” said Harry, gritting his teeth.

“How?”

“In my dreams,” sighed Harry. There were a few moments of silence. Everyone just stood there, beholding the Glove as if it were the first fire ever to be seen on Earth, and they were all cold cavemen.

“Well then...” heaved Dumbledore, breaking the silence. “What are you going to do with it?”

“We want you to have it,” said Harry. Muttering those words was like trying to lift an anvil. For some reason, no matter how much Harry didn’t really personally care about the Glove and really wanted Dumbledore to keep it safe, actually saying that he did was incredibly difficult.

“So that you can protect it,” added Hermione, “better than we have been.”

“I certainly will,” said Dumbledore seriously, facing the two of them. He picked up the Glove and put it in the same drawer as the Watch was in. Harry peered inside as he did, wanting to see if the Watch was still there. To his surprise, it wasn’t. “I can guarantee you that as long as I am alive, no other soul shall touch this Glove.”

Harry was about to open his mouth to ask where the Watch had gone, then he remembered he wasn’t supposed to have seen it in the first place.

“What was that Harry?” asked Dumbledore, seeing his attempted question.

“Nothing...” said Harry. “Nothing.”

“But what about Ron?” demanded Hermione.

“Mr. Weasley?” asked Dumbledore. “Well, if he is within Voldemort’s clutches right now, our Aurors will find him shortly. Since Voldemort did not leave you any specific instructions on how you were to give him the Glove, I am assuming he did not expect it right away. I’m sure by the time he is found, Mr. Weasley will still be alive.”

“Isn’t there anything else you can do?” swallowed Harry.

“I’m afraid not,” sighed Dumbledore.

“But what if we try to find him!” suggested Hermione. “We’ve done harder things before! I’m sure that if-”

“No,” interrupted Dumbledore, softly but very stern and seriously. “For once in my life, I must insist. You two are not to go looking for your friend. Voldemort’s powers have increased drastically over the past year, and I’m sure that he would love to show them off to you two, and trust me: he can do things that are so horrible and twisted you would wish that you were dead.”

“And we’re supposed to stay here, while Ron is experiencing that?” demanded Harry, taking a tone with the Headmaster that he had never before. Hermione shot a look at him that asked him what he thought he was doing.

“I am afraid so,” said Dumbledore. “There’s nothing that you two can do for him. I will send word out immediately, and he shall be found soon enough. Now, I can put charms on you that will prevent you from stepping out of the castle. But, I think I can trust you enough so that I don’t. Do we agree?”

“Yes,” said Harry and Hermione together.

“Very well then,” said Dumbledore, taking a breath. “I ask for you two to leave now while I send out the emergency word. I will tell you their progress tomorrow. Until then, try to sleep.”

“Yes headmaster,” said Hermione respectfully.

“Whatever you say... Dumbledore,” said Harry, thinking that the headmaster was not doing everything in his power to save Ron. They stepped out of the room and walked down the stairs, arriving back in the main hallway.

“What do you think, Hermione?” asked Harry when they started on their way back. “Do you think that Dumbledore- AAAHHH!”

Suddenly, Hermione leapt through the air and pounced right on top of Harry, like some sort of leopard or lion hunting its prey. Her eyes were bloodshot and she was drooling through her teeth.

“What do you think you’re doing!?” demanded Harry, trying to push her off. She was much stronger now than ever before. It was as if Harry was trying to push a house off of him, a very vicious house.

“Give me the Ring!” she yelled, in a voice that was not hers. It was deeper and very raspy, like a voice that hadn’t been used in years.

“No!” yelled Harry, wondering what he should do and what was going on. “Stop Hermione! Stop now!”

Just then, as if she were obeying his command, Hermione let go of his arms and legs and stood up, looking perfectly normal.

“Harry...” she asked, sounding frightened. “What just happened?”

“You attacked me,” said Harry, getting to his feet with some difficulty. “You wanted my Ring.”

“Why did I stop?”

“Because I asked you to...” said Harry, breathing hard and still wondering what the heck was going on. He decided to try a little experiment. “Hermione! Sit down!”

As if she were a pet dog doing tricks, Hermione sat down as quickly as she could and looked at Harry with a blank gaze. What was going on?

“Hermione! Stand up!”

As expected, she stood right up again.

“How are you controlling me?” she asked, looking both horrified and amazed.

“I... don’t know,” said Harry, his mind feeling like Jell-o.

“But I think I do!” said Hermione suddenly, grabbing Harry by the arm. “I think it’s because of your Ring!”

“What? My Animagus one?”

“No!” she said, shaking her head. “The Ring of the Ancients! I think that maybe it has even more powers, some that we don’t even know about.”

“Well how can we find out what they are?” asked Harry curiously. “Go back to Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom?”

“No, that book didn’t have much more information in it,” said Hermione, stroking her chin.

“The library?”

“No way, they wouldn’t carry information on things like that.”

“Then what?” asked Harry exasperantly.

“Well... we could.... No. No way.”

“What?” questioned Harry, his curiosity only now greater because she didn’t want to do it.

“Well...” she continued, lowering her voice slightly. “Sixth Years and under aren’t even supposed to know about it, it’s only for advanced research. I only know about it because I stumbled upon it once in a book.”

“What is it?”

“The wNet,” said Hermione. “The wizard internet.”

“What’s so secret about that?” asked Harry. When he was at the Dursleys’ years ago, he went online every now and then, when Dudley wasn’t around. There wasn’t anything too dangerous.

“The wNet and Muggle Internet are almost completely different,” said Hermione, wavering her arms. “For one thing, the wNet has been around for thousands of years. Also, the wNet is much more dangerous.”

“How can it be dangerous?”

“Well, you know how there are Muggle hackers?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, they’re nothing compared to wizard hackers. They can program horrible traps and pitfalls, and not to mention dark wizards to pop up all around you as you research. Unless you know how to defend yourself very well, you can get badly hurt.”

“As long as it will give us the information we need, I’m all for it,” said Harry, trying to sound brave.

“Alright,” sighed Hermione. “But let’s try to go somewhere private, so that no one will see us cast the spell.”

They walked down the practically deserted hallway, in search of any empty room. Most of them were occupied by teachers, having meetings with each other or students. But, there was no one in the closet!

“Here, the broom closet,” said Hermione, opening the door to the smallest and most dilapidated room Harry had ever seen. It was probably one of Filch’s old closets, one of his really old ones. The three brooms that were in there had mildew and dust all over, with spiders and cobwebs hanging everywhere.

“Well, at least no one will find us here,” sighed Harry, walking in with Hermione and brushing all of the stuff out of his way with his hand. She closed the door and they were all alone; in the pitch black closet. Harry couldn’t help but giggle a little.

“Oh shut up,” said Hermione. Even through the darkness, Harry could see her blushing. “Just because Ron’s not here doesn’t mean I’m not with him anymore.”

“Okay,” said Harry, bringing them back to the real world. “How do we get to the wNet anyways?”

“It’s a simple spell,” said Hermione, rolling up her sleeves. “wNet Accessium!”

Suddenly, the world around Harry exploded. The small, dark closet that they were in was no more and the two of them appeared on an infinite blue plain with some white mist slightly above it, floating around.

“Watch it!” yelled Hermione, putting out her arm in front of Harry as he took a step forward. He looked down and saw that below him a hole had appeared, one that looked as though it had no bottom.

“Where did that come from?” gasped Harry.

“See what I told you?” said Hermione. “This place is treacherous. If you had fallen down that hole you would probably have spent the next month in the Hospital Wing, not to mention having to answer some questions as to why you were here anyways. Unless you keep all of your eyes out at all times, you’ll wind up dead. Even though we may appear to be in a different world, our bodies are still in the closet and they can get hurt.”

“Alright,” said Harry impatiently, putting his hands up. “Can we just get the information and get out of here?”

“Okay,” smiled Hermione, looking excited. “wNet! I want to search!”

“How may I help you... Hermione Granger?” said a thin screen in a computer-like voice that suddenly appeared in front of the two of them. It looked a little like a window, only the glass was a light blue, and there was a cartoonish human-like face in the middle. It floated about them, almost like a ghost.

“wNet,” continued Hermione, seeing from the expression on Harry’s face that he had no idea what was going on, “what information can you give me on the Ring of the Ancients?”

“Searching... Ring of the Ancients...” whirred the screen. The head spun around quickly and a question mark appeared above it. A moment later, the question mark turned into a glowing light bulb and the head stopped rotating, and it began talking.

“The Ring of the Ancients was created by the earliest Egyptians.” As it spoke, new screens appeared all around Harry and Hermione, depicting various scenes of what it was talking about. A moving image of some peasants building a pyramid was shown, along with another one showing the four Items and the Sorcerer’s Stone. With almost every word, a new screen showed up. “It was made to try and stop so many heroes from becoming gods by making it an extra ingredient in the Immortal Potion. It also—”

“Yeah yeah,” said Harry, waving his arm hurriedly. “We know all that.”

“Is there anything else you can tell us about it?” asked Hermione. “Like, any other powers it has besides being an Ingredient?”

“Yes,” said the screen distastefully. Evidently, it didn’t like being interrupted very much. “The Ring was forged with a few additional powers. The Ring’s, along with the Watch’s, Bracelet’s and Glove’s wearer will find that he or she cannot bear the thought of being without it. This is because the power the Items give their bearers are addictive, making the bearers unable to concentrate when they are not wearing their Items. Also, if the Ring bearer takes the Ring off, and this applies only to the Ring, and another one puts it on, whoever was the previous wearer will become a slave to the current one. Dark Wizards have used the Ring of the Ancients for centuries to create vast armies of mindless drones.”

“So that’s why I attacked you,” said Hermione, thinking hard. “My desire for it was almost overwhelming, so I pinned you down demanding it. Then, when you told me to stop, I did because you were the current wearer, and I had it on previously. Right now, whatever you tell me to do, I will have to.”

“Sounds like a nice deal,” grinned Harry, looking at his Ring in a new light. This thing had built armies and started wars. This small piece of jewelry had caused civilizations to collapse and then others to grow under the extreme dictatorship of others. How did it ever end up in that old shop in Knockturn Alley?

“Does it have any other powers?” asked Hermione, trying to find the original screen with the cartoonish head through the dozens of others that were now all around them.

“Not too many,” said the head. “It slightly amplifies the wearer’s magical power, and increases their stamina a little. It also changes the temperature of the surroundings if someone that has made the wearer a secret-keeper is near. The colder it gets, the more serious the secret.”

“Is that all?” asked Harry, wanting to leave the overwhelming amount of screens and get back to the real world.

“Yes.”

“Then let’s get out of here,” said Hermione.

“Goodbye... Harry Potter. Goodbye... Hermione Granger,” said the face, bowing slightly. When it raised itself back up, all of the other screens disappeared and the two of them were back in the blue-floored oblivion.

“wNet Partius!” said Hermione, waving her wand hand. The world around them swirled and spun, bringing them back into reality, and back into the broom closet.

“Now what do we do?” she asked generally, opening the door.

“Well I,” said Harry, checking his watch, “have to go to the last Quidditch practice of the year. You should go to Madam Pomfrey to get that curse that the Ring gave you lifted off of you.”

“What should I tell her?” she demanded. “That you have the Ring of the Ancients and you are able to control me? I don’t think she’ll buy that.”

“Just tell her you haven’t been feeling yourself. She’ll give you a normal check up, find the curse herself, and probably fix it, thinking it’s nothing.”

“I don’t know, it sounds awful risky-”

“Hermione,” said Harry sternly. “I am ordering you to go to Madam Pomfrey and tell her what I told you.”

“Okay Harry,” she responded robotically under the power of the curse. Hermione immediately walked off in the direction of the Hospital Wing.

“Man, it’s too bad she’s going to lose that curse,” said Harry to himself when she was out of sight. “It might have come in handy.”

Harry ran off to his team’s Quidditch practice. He tried to avoid the questions about where Ron was by immediately changing the subject, but every time one of them asked, Harry was reminded that his friend was still missing. Finally worn out from worrying about his friend, and from the strenuous final practice, Harry collapsed into his bed that night, instantly falling asleep.

“Get up, Harry!”

“Enh...” Harry groaned, pulling the comfortable blanket over his head.

“Come on! You’ll be late for breakfast!”

“Fine fine,” he mumbled, sitting up and putting his glasses on. When the world came into focus, he nearly fell back onto his pillow.

Right there in front of him, was Ron.

At first, Harry just looked in awe at his friend, his jaw opened and his eyes wide. How was it that, only a matter of hours ago, he was being searched for by parties of Aurors, and now he was walking around in front of him, making his bed and acting as if nothing had happened.

“RON!” yelled Harry, surprising himself at how loud he said it. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“I’m getting ready for class,” he said, staring at Harry. “I don’t know what you’re doing, but whatever it is, you had better get up now so you can do it.”

“No,” said Harry, shaking his head furiously. “What are you doing here? You’re supposed to be missing!”

“Am I?” he asked curiously.

“Yes!” said Harry dumbfoundedly. “You were gone all day yesterday! Hermione and I were searching everywhere for you!”

“Didn’t I tell you?” he asked. “I was with Professor Quirrell all day yesterday doing some extra credit. I need it to pass the class with slightly-above-average marks. Sorry, I thought I told you that.”

“But, you didn’t show up on the Marauder’s Map!” said Harry, still in shock of what was going on.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Ron, looking at Harry as though he was crazy. “If you had looked on the Map, I would have been there. If this is all about me missing yesterday’s final practice, I’m sorry, but I have to pass Defense Against the Dark Arts.”

“But... but....” gasped Harry, wanting to wake up from this dream.

“I’ll see you downstairs at breakfast,” said Ron distastefully, walking out of the room. When he shut the door behind him, Harry just stared blankly at it, his mind trying to catch up with what was going on.

“Wait Ron!” he said after a few seconds, throwing his covers away and jumping off of the bed. He still wanted to know what had really happened and having Ron angry at him would not help. Harry quickly threw his school robes on over his head and ran downstairs, calling Ron’s name as he went.

“What are you yelling about?” demanded Hermione when Harry arrived in the common room. She was sitting in a chair, reading up on today’s lessons.

“Ron’s here!” exclaimed Harry, shaking his hands and arms.

“What?” she asked, closing the book.

“He woke me up!”

“Well where did he go?”

“To breakfast I think.”

“What are we waiting for!?” she said, shoving her books into her backpack. “Let’s go get him!”

“Wait a minute, Hermione,” said Harry, finally regaining control of his brain. “Why don’t we go see Dumbledore first, maybe he knows what’s going on.”

“No,” she said, standing up. Evidently, Madam Pomfrey had fixed her curse from the Ring; she wasn’t obeying Harry’s command. “If anyone knows what happens, it’s got to be the person that all this has happened to: Ron.”

“He just thinks he was doing some extra Defense Against the Dark Arts credit all day yesterday. Obviously, someone put a spell on him just to think that.”

“Well then what should we do?”

“Dumbledore said he was going to try and find him,” said Harry. “He must have found him, and changed his memory around. He’ll know what’s really going on.”

Not wasting another second with talking, the two of them ran to Dumbledore's office, knowing they didn't have much time since classes would begin in only a few minutes.

"Hey!" said Harry, looking at the announcement bulletin board. "There's a Wizard Duel meeting tonight! It's about time!"

"Maybe I'll come tonight," said Hermione softly.

"Really?" asked Harry, amazed at her change of mind.

"Yeah, I played it once with Ron a while ago... it was okay."

"I can't wait to play you then," grinned Harry when they arrived at the very familiar gargoyle guarding Dumbledore's office. Harry muttered the password and it move aside. They ran up into the office, throwing open the door.

"Professor Dumbledore!" yelled the two of them, running into the room with so much force that papers flew all over like birds. Dumbledore was sitting behind his desk and he fell over in his chair, startling Fawkes and causing some books to fall off of the shelves.

"Stop bursting in one me like that!" said Dumbledore angrily, picking himself up. "Would you please knock before you enter!?"

"Sorry professor," said Harry, watching him pick up the mess magically. "But this is just as urgent as yesterday."

"We've found Ron," said Hermione. "Or, rather, he's appeared back."

"I know that," said Dumbledore, picking up his chair and straightening his hat.

"So where was he all day yesterday?" asked Harry, not wasting any time in asking how Dumbledore knew Ron was back, since he understood exactly how he did.

"Didn't he tell you?" questioned Dumbledore, sitting back down in his chair. "He was with Professor Quirrell."

"That's what he told us," said Hermione. "But what really happened?"

"What really happened," continued Dumbledore, sounding a little agitated, "is that your friend Ron Weasley spent all day yesterday doing Defense Against the Dark Arts extra credit, which might I add, he desperately needed."

"But," sputtered Harry, almost in disbelief of what he was hearing, "he wasn't anywhere on the Map!"

"What map?" asked Dumbledore, leaning in closer.

"The Marauder's Map," explained Hermione. "It shows every passageway in the school, along with where everyone is."

Dumbledore's eyes widened.

"And you have this map... at your disposal?"

"Yes," said Harry. "Me, Hermione and Ron have had it for the past three years. Fred and George gave it to me."

"I think you two should be leaving now," said Dumbledore quietly.

"But... what about Ron?"

"Ron is okay now, and that is all that matters," he said, again very softly. "Voldemort must have known Ron was going to be doing work all day yesterday and decided to pull a bluff. He wanted you two to bring him the Glove even though Ron was never in his possession."

"But," grunted Harry, just as the bell rang, shocked at what he was hearing, "that can't be the truth; we would have seen him."

"We'll talk at another time," said Dumbledore in a more authoritative voice. He stood up and started pushing them out of his room. "Right now, you have to go to class."

Not wanting to get in an argument with Dumbledore, Harry decided just to go along with what he wanted for now and to leave. Dumbledore shut the door behind them and they made their way down the stairs.

“Do you think Ron really was just with Quirrell all day?” asked Hermione.

“I don’t know...” Harry sighed. “I don’t know.”

It was not one of Harry’s better days at Hogwarts. All day long, he, Hermione and Ron discussed what had happened, but Ron still swore that he was with Quirrell all day. In Defense Against the Dark Arts, Harry decided to try and ask Malfoy if he knew anything. But, he had changed his seat to one far away from Harry, back with the other Slytherins. Their friendship was now officially over.

In each class, they were reminded that finals were only a few weeks away and once again, they were on the day after the Quidditch final and the last Dueling Club meeting, the one that would be in front of the entire school. All of this going on made Harry just want to go to sleep, and when he woke up, it would all be over. The only light at the end of the tunnel was that at the end of the day today, there was going to be a Dueling Club meeting. During dinner that night, Harry, Ron and Hermione were talking excitedly about it.

“I’m still quite new to the game,” said Hermione. “I hope I do okay.”

“I’m sure you’ll do fine,” said Ron.

“Yeah,” added Harry. “Besides, the game is more based on luck than strategy, and we three are very lucky.”

“Attention students!” announced Dumbledore suddenly, breaking the air of conversation that was all around the Great Hall. It was very unusual, for him to make an announcement at Dinner. It must be very important.

“I know that many of you,” he continued, “are still disappointed at the unfortunate early departure that we had from Geb Pyramid. So, it has been a unanimous decision amongst the faculty to bring about another fun activity for you to take part in. It is my great honor to announce that the Disguise Dance will be held at the end of this year, after the finals are over.”

The Hall broke into a cloud of confused talk.

“What’s that?”

“Is it like the Yule Ball?”

“Do we put on masks?”

“Students... students...” resumed Dumbledore. “The Disguise Dance is a privilege given to very few groups of students at Hogwarts. I believe that since this school’s founding, there have only been a few dozen of them.

“The Disguise Dance was originally just a way for old headmasters to find out who was causing trouble at the school. They put a spell on the masks so that when you wore it, if you lied, it would start turning all sorts of wild colors. So, at random times during the dance, they would ask questions regarding vandalisms and such so that everyone could hear, and whoever’s mask turned colors, they knew it was their fault. It was quick, legal, and the students didn’t even know what was going on until it was too late.

“But, everyone had such a good time at the dances that even after they had served their purpose, they were held every so often, and students were allowed to wear any sort of costumes that they wanted. Traditionally, the winning house hosts and holds the dance, so if you want yours to have that spectacular honor, then I recommend you earn as many points as you can.”

“Well, it looks like Gryffindor will be holding it,” said Ron when everyone in the Hall started talking again after Dumbledore finished. “We’ve won the past five years and it doesn’t seem as though we’re going to lose anytime soon.”

“I certainly hope so,” said Hermione. “It sounds like fun!”

“Only you won’t be able to tell who’s who if we’re all wearing costumes,” added Harry. “You won’t be able to tell if you’re with your date, or someone else.”

“But that’s half the fun,” said Hermione excitedly. “See if the two of you really love each other enough to be able to tell without actually seeing him.”

“Or her,” added Harry.

Harry, along with almost the rest of the entire school, didn’t really pay much attention to anything else said after Dumbledore’s announcement. They all were so excited about this spectacular dance that they were going to be part of that everything else seemed almost unimportant. But, when the time came around for the final Wizard Duel Club Meeting, Harry, Ron, and Hermione broke out of that state of mind and made their way down to the Great Hall again.

“Oh man!” exclaimed Ron when the three of them stepped into the room. If Harry didn’t know better, he would have thought that there was another meal going on. Almost everyone in the entire school was inside the Great Hall, each with a deck of cards, ready to go. It was as if there was a flood in the room, only with people instead of water.

“There weren’t even close to this many people at the last meeting,” commented Harry, working his way through the crowd and up to where he thought the front was.

“Yeah... it’s kind of weird isn’t it?” said Hermione. “Why did so much of the school suddenly get into it?”

“Who cares?” asked Ron, a hungry look in his eyes. “They’re all new to the game, so I can beat them all!”

“We’ll see about that....”

“Hello everyone!” boomed Ak’s magnified voice over the crowd. He was on a slightly boosted platform that put him over the heads of everyone. He looked quite happy as well; his club was a big success. “I am glad that you all are here! Now, since there are so many of you tonight, it would be far too confusing, awkward, and time consuming to create a list and match you all up individually. So, what we are going to do is instead have you choose your opponents, and then you duel with him or her. If you lose the match, please move over here,” he waved his arm in the direction of the space behind him that was marked off by a magically hovering yellow tape. “Once there are four people left standing, we will have a special team duel that should prove to be quite interesting.”

“Can we start now!?” yelled an anxious member.

Ak grinned.

“You may begin.”

The Great Hall suddenly erupted into a chaotic mass of everyone eagerly talking to everyone else, trying to find someone to duel. Couples of fighters scattered off in random directions all over the room, sitting down and facing off.

“You want to play, Harry?” asked Ron eagerly.

“Are you sure that you want to play me this early?” asked Harry. “That means only one of us will be able to continue in the tournament.”

“Well, that way the one who has a chance in the rest will still get to go, and the one who is obviously worse will be able to rest. He wouldn’t have won in the end anyway.”

“Alright,” said Harry, whipping out his deck of cards. “Let’s go!”

The two of them looked around the room, trying to find an open area where they could play. At first glance, it seemed as though the entire floor was covered by students, but Ron spotted a small, empty corner. They stepped over everybody’s heads and made their way there, sitting down and beginning the duel.

“You’re going down, Harry,” grinned Ron, shuffling his deck up.

“What are you talking about? You’ve only beaten me a handful of times this entire year, and that was before I was good.”

“That’s just because you keep getting those Dumbledores out,” grimaced Ron.

“Yeah, they’re pretty powerful cards,” smiled Harry, drawing his opening hand. “But I’ll bet they’re even better when they’re all combined into one.”

“Yeah yeah,” said Ron, interrupting Harry’s dream. “Let’s get this game started. Since you probably have the advantage here, I’ll go first.”

“Fine with me.”

“For my first action,” said Ron, beginning the game with a tone of power in his voice, “I will play... The Nimbus Two-Thousand!”

Ron threw the card onto the small playing field. Harry chuckled to himself; so Ron was using his Quidditch deck. This was going to be very easy.

“And then,” he continued, “I will play Viktor Krum as it’s rider.”

The familiar messed up face of Viktor on his card made its way on top of the broom as Ron gently placed it there.

“Your turn,” he said as if the game was his after just the two actions. Harry drew his card, and looked at his hand of cards. There was a Hungarian Horntail, a Hippogriff, a Stupefy, a Merging Spell, a Summoning Charm and he just drew a Dementor.

“For my actions,” said Harry, his fingers tingling from the anticipation of putting down some cards, “I will play a Hungarian Horntail and then a Dementor.” He slapped the cards down in front of Ron, wiping the grin off his face. “Let’s see little Krummy-Wummy deal with that!”

“He’ll find a way,” muttered Ron, not sounding too confident that he would. “I’m not going to attack with Krum, obviously, and I’ll draw my card.” He quickly grabbed the top card of his deck and threw it into his hand, glancing it over and then smiling. “For my first action, I will play Quidditch Field. It prevents all damage dealt to all Quidditch players... and that includes my Krum.”

“Yeah yeah I know what it does,” groaned Harry.

“And!” exclaimed Ron, sounding much happier. “I will play the Snitch too, which gives all Quidditch players extra Power! Now not only is Krum invincible, but he can pack a punch too!”

“We’ll see about that,” said Harry, hoping for something good as he drew his card. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw what it was: a Korosucide! If Harry was lucky, it would destroy the Quidditch Field. “I’m going to play... Korosucide!” Since the card that Korosucide destroyed was random, Harry held the card high above the playing field, closed his eyes and let go of it, hoping that it would land on one of Ron’s cards. He heard the soft sound if it coming in contact with the ground and Harry opened his eyes.

“Whoops,” exclaimed Ron, grinning. Harry looked down and saw that the Korosucide card had landed on his Dementor. He sighed and put the two cards in his discard pile. Things were not going very well.

“I guess I’ll just Stupefy your Viktor Krum now,” heaved Harry. “Now at least he can’t attack my Horntail.”

“For one turn anyways,” grinned Ron as he drew his card. “And now, I’ll play another Nimbus Two-Thousand and then a Ludo Bagman for its rider! Now I have two invincible and powerful broomed warriors!”

“Great,” sighed Harry as he drew a Lumos Spell. “I guess I’ll play my Hippogriff, and then merge it with my Hungarian Horntail.” Harry put the two cards on top of each other, and tried to imagine what the new beast would look like.

“Good, now I have to only beat one monster instead of two,” said Ron, beginning his turn. “First, I’m going to attack your Hungarian-Griff with Krum and Bagman, killing it. Then, I’ll put out a Firebolt this time, and make Quigley, from the Ireland team, its rider.”

Harry’s hope was quickly fading as he moved his combined creature into his discard pile and looked at Ron’s three invincible fighters. He had no more fighters in his hand to defend against their attacks, so next turn, all their power would go directly to his deck and nearly wipe him out. He had to get something good.... Harry drew his card.

“An Engorgio Charm,” moaned Harry, very disappointed. He looked through the measly cards in his hand again, to see if there was anything worth using. All that he could really use was the Summoning Charm. “I’m going to draw five cards with the Summoning Charm.”

“Whatever,” smirked Ron.

Harry drew his five cards: another Engorgio Charm, a Disarming Charm, a Lumos Spell, a Merging Spell and-

“Dumbledore,” said Harry to himself, looking at the wonderful card. He did a silent gesture of happiness, and then smiled, ready to beat Ron. “And for my last action, I will play Dumbledore!”

“No! Not again!” cried Ron as the card came onto the floor. He had been the victim of Dumbledore’s special ability many times, and now was going to be no different.

“And now it’s time for Dumbledore’s ability to take effect, all your cards are belong to me!” Harry made a giant sweeping motion, making his arms like rakes and Ron’s cards like leaves. He brought them all over to his playing side... they were now his. The Quidditch Field, the Snitch, the three fighters... all of it.

“Your turn, Ronnie,” winked Harry.

“Just when I was about to win....”

“That’s what Dumbledore does, he’ll take you by surprise and turn everyone you know against you,” said Harry sarcastically.

“Oh no!” yelled Ron, looking at the card he just drew. “I didn’t get any fighters! Nothing can defend me from your attack next turn! I lost!”

“As usual,” beamed Harry, gathering up his cards and giving Ron back his. “Sorry to take you out of the tournament, though.”

“It’s okay, I probably would have lost eventually anyway. Those Dumbledores are just unbeatable.”

“Pretty much,” said Harry, nodding his head and looking around the room for another person to play. “I don’t know any cards that can beat him.”

“I’ll see you in the loser’s bin,” sighed Ron as he headed over to the designated area where the losers of each match went. There were already several others in there with him, and more were coming in by the minute.

“We’ll just see about that.”

“Hey Harry Potter!” yelled a student that Harry had never seen before. Harry turned around, and before him was a fourth year Ravenclaw that had a very determined look on her freckled face. “You want to play me, or are you afraid?”

“Even though you are definitely very intimidating,” said Harry facetiously, “I think I’ll try my luck.”

“Huzzah!” shrieked the child. “Prepare to be defeated!”

Despite all of her previous bragging, it was a very easy match. It was only a few turns until Harry dominated the field with his Voldemort and then a strategic Dumbledore when she had several fighters out. The look on her face when that happened was priceless.

After that match, the loser’s area was getting very crowded, and the people that were still left available to play wouldn’t go near Harry. He was the champion, and nobody wanted to wreck their chances at victory by playing him. It wasn’t nearly as much fun watching the people that were left play each other than actually playing a game. Luckily for Harry, the last four contestants were revealed fairly soon.

“Well it seems as though the final four have arrived,” said Ak when the loser’s area was so crowded that the people had to stand on top of each other to fit in. Harry looked to see who the last four remaining were: himself, Ak, Malfoy surprisingly, and-

“Hermione!” exclaimed Harry when he saw her there amongst them. “How on Earth did you get here!”

“Well, this game isn’t too difficult to strategize with,” she shrugged, “and the rest is just luck, which I’ve got plenty of since I’m a beginner.”

“Well I congratulate you three on getting to the final round,” smiled Ak to them. “This deciding match will certainly be a fun one, that is guaranteed.” With that, he took his wand out of his pocket and tapped the ground with it. There was a small shake all over the room and a small hole opened up in front of them, bringing out with it a large table that had the same surface as the holographic playing table, only it was about four times as large, and much higher up.

“All four of us will play here,” he said.

“All against each other?” asked Harry.

“No, we’ll all get into two teams of two and then play against each other like that.”

“How will we decide teams?” asked Malfoy, looking at Harry distastefully.

“How do you want to decide teams?” asked Ak.

“How about... I’m not with Potter.”

“Alright then, it will be you and me Malfoy, against Hermione and Harry.”

“Sounds almost too easy to be true....”

“Everyone in the losing area,” announced Ak, “you can now come back to the main hall where you can watch the final match!”

The massive crowd shuffled it’s way over to the table where the final four contenders were each at a different corner, ready to play. Everyone was so eager to see what was going on that they were pressing up right against Harry, Hermione, Malfoy and Ak, pushing them almost onto the table’s surface.

“Harry,” said Ak to everyone, “you know the drill. Put your decks into the slot, and your starting hand will appear in front of you.”

“How exactly will this team game work?” asked Harry, as he slipped his deck into the slot along with everyone else.

“It’s very easy. All we do is take turns by each individual taking a turn and he or she can do whatever they want. But, if one person on a team loses, then the entire team loses. Understand?”

“Yeah,” said the four of them together as their cards appeared in front of them. Harry couldn’t see Malfoy’s or Ak’s, but he could see his and Hermione’s. She had a Disarming Spell, a Stupefy, a Meherius Spell, an Increase Time Spell, and a Lumos. No fighters.

“Hermione!” whispered Harry to her. “Where are your fighters?”

“Don’t have any,” she whispered back.

“Oh great...” sighed Harry, looking at his starting hand: a Hippogriff, a Phoenix, a Merging Spell, an Engorgio, and... a Voldemort! Things were starting to look up.

“Now we flip a coin to see who goes first,” said Ak, taking out a Galleon. “Which side do you want, wizard or ministry?”

“What do you think, Hermione?”

“Let’s go with... wizard!”

“Alright!” said Ak, tossing the coin up in the air as everyone’s eyes in the room watching it go all the way up, spin around a few times and then land back down, with the wizard side up.

“Okay then, you go first Harry,” said Ak.

“Hey Potter,” said Malfoy. “Are you feeling lucky after that coin flip?”

“It depends why.”

“How about we make this match even more interesting,” he said, raising his eyebrows.

“Well, how about we put a small wager on the match,” he grinned. “The winning team gets fifty points added to each member’s house.”

“Seeing as Gryffindor gets at least fifty points either way,” said Harry, “I’m in.”

“Excellent...” hissed Malfoy.

“Harry, it’s still your turn,” said Ak, sounding like he wanted to get underway.

“Very well,” grinned Harry, the faces of all the students pressing in on him as the table gave him his card (a Stupefy). “For my first action, I will play Voldemort!”

Harry slapped the holographic version of the card down on the table and the small form of the horrible wizard appeared on the table. His arms were folding and he had a snarl on his face, ready to go.

“And then I will use an Engorgio Charm on him, to make him even stronger!” proclaimed Harry, feeling that victory was close, even though it was the first turn.

“Now whose turn is it, Ak?” demanded Malfoy.

“Actually, it’s yours now, then Hermione’s, then mine.”

“Excellent,” hissed Malfoy, drawing his card. “First, I’ll use another Engorgio Charm on your Voldemort.” He threw the hologram card next to Harry’s Voldemort and it grew even taller, its power increasing.

“What did you do that for?” asked Harry. “Now I’ll just beat you faster!”

“And now,” continued Malfoy, going on as if he hadn’t heard Harry, “I’ll play a Voldemort of my own.” Malfoy placed the card down, and the two Voldemort’s faced each other. Harry’s bigger one smirked at Malfoy’s, and his just started at Harry’s, giving him horrible looks.

“My turn,” announced Hermione as she drew her card. Harry saw that it was another Maherius. “I’ll play a Stupefy on your Voldemort, Malfoy.” She gently laid the holograph down on the table and a red beam shot out, hitting the Voldemort and giving him a red glow, preventing him from attacking... for one turn anyway. “Then, I’ll use a Maherius Curse on myself.”

“Hermione!” yelled Harry as the spell hit her deck and she lost five cards. “What do you think you’re doing!?”

“Don’t worry...” she smiled. “I got here, didn’t I? My strategy must work.”

“Yeah, but by killing yourself?”

“My turn now,” announced Ak, breaking up Harry and Hermione. “I’m going to firstly use yet another Engorgio Spell on your Voldemort there Harry.”

“Be my guest!” said Harry as his Voldemort grew even taller and more powerful.

“Then,” grinned Ak, “I’ll use the Imperius Curse on you Voldemort and bring him over to our side.”

“No!” yelled Harry amongst chatter and some laughter from the crowd as his Voldemort disappeared in a puff of smoke and reappeared on Ak’s side. That’s why they were making him so powerful, so they could just scoop him up and make him theirs. Sneaky....

“Your turn, Harry,” smiled Malfoy.

“I know that,” hissed Harry as the table dealt him his card, angry that he had lost his Voldemort. He had drawn an Increase Time Spell. That wouldn’t help him very much right now.

“I guess I’ll play my phoenix first,” said Harry, still a little down. The wonderful phoenix popped out of the surface, flapping its wings and sending little embers all over. “Then I’ll stupefy your more powerful Voldemort, Ak.”

“Playing defensive, are we Potter?” asked Malfoy, getting his card.

“A good defense is a good offense.”

“Yes, well a good offense is an even better offense,” he smirked back. “For my first action, I’ll play another Voldemort for you two to deal with, and I believe that kills your little phoenix as well. Then for my second, I will put out a Constant Vigilance Potion.”

“What does that do?” asked Hermione as the Voldemort appeared next to the other two and a bubbling cauldron as well. Harry’s phoenix collapsed to the crowd and disappeared to the discard pile.

“Granger, it’s your turn now,” said Malfoy, ignoring her question.

“Fine. I’ll play a Stupefy on your new Voldemort, Malfoy, saving us for a turn. Then, I’ll play another Maherius Curse on myself!”

“Hermione!” yelled Harry again. “Use that on one of their Voldemorts, not yourself!”

“Don’t worry...”

“Okay, how about I start off by making the number of Voldemorts on the field an even four?” smiled Ak, beginning his turn immediately. The fourth Voldemort appeared on the field. With it’s rising, Harry’s hope sank. How could he possibly defend against four Voldemorts? It was almost impossible.

“Now, it’s time to win this match,” said Ak, with a fire in his eyes. “I’ll use a Merging Spell on all four Voldemorts, creating the most horrible fighting force this earth has ever seen!”

As soon as he placed the Merging Spell on the table, four holographic snakes appeared and they slithered across the surface of the table, each wrapping themselves around a Voldemort. Once they all were holding their victims securely, they slithered back to the same spot and melted together, creating a hideous, multi-colored blob of Voldemort and snake. It jiggled and flashed colors, then took form.

The new fighter was the most terrifying thing Harry had ever seen. It stood almost three feet tall on the table, shadowing over everyone in the room. It’s head looked like Voldemort’s only it had snakes where there should have been hair. They all snapped and bit at each other, hoping to kill all others but himself. The monster had six arms, three on either side with long, knife-like fingers coming off of each. There were snakes popping out and hissing all over the monster’s body and they wrapped themselves around its arms, occasionally cutting themselves on his sharp fingers. Behind it was a massive, black cape that dragged on the floor, adding to its terrifyingness.

“Four separate Voldemorts are definitely a formidable fighting force,” said Ak, smiling and licking his lips, eyeing his new fighter. “But, their true power can only be seen best when they are combined into the Ultimate Voldemort!”

"It won't take long to beat you now with this guy," added Malfoy. "Especially you, suicidal Granger."

"The game's not over just yet," mumbled Harry, not feeling too sure of his own confidence. He waited for the table to deal him his card, wondering what he could possibly get that could help him now. When he saw what it was that he got, Harry was overjoyed.

"Voldemort may be strong," said Harry, "but no matter how strong he gets, he'll still never be a match for... Dumbledore!" He threw the hologram on the table and watched it appear, feeling a new source of hope inside him. With Dumbledore's ability, the Ultimate Voldemort would be his and Hermione's!

"How on Earth did you get a Dumbledore?" demanded Malfoy.

"Probably from Aylar," said Ak.

"No way, I got mine the real way," smirked Harry as he waited for the Ultimate Voldemort to disappear and then reappear on their side, but it wasn't happening.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Malfoy. "Take the rest of your turn!"

"I'm waiting for us to gain control of your Ultimate Voldemort," said Harry.

"Why would that happen?" asked Ak.

"Because of Dumbledore's ability!" said Harry, getting a little upset. "I gain control of all my opponent's fighters when he comes into play."

"You idiot!" yelled Malfoy, scaring some of the kids around him. "What do you think the Constant Vigilance Potion does? It prevents any of our fighters from being taken control of! Dumbledore's power is useless!"

"You're kidding..." sighed Harry, their chances of winning going down the drain.

"Afraid not," smiled Malfoy.

"Then I guess I'll just use my last action to draw a card," groaned Harry. He got a Summoning Spell. Maybe he'd get something better next turn.

"I think I'll just forgo my turn," said Malfoy, "so that Ak can get this game over with by attacking with Ultimate Voldemort."

"It's not Ak's turn yet," said Hermione, getting her card. "And he's not going to be able to attack with his Voldemort anyway, because I am stupefying him!"

"You're just putting off the inevitable," said Ak as the red beam hit the Ultimate Voldemort. "Not it will just take one more turn to crush you."

"And then I'll use a Disarming Spell on your Constant Vigilance Potion," said Hermione with a serious look on her face. The red beam shot out and hit the cauldron, shattering it into a million pieces before it disappeared.

"Come on let's get this over with," groaned Ak. "I'll pass my turn like Malfoy."

"And then I'll start mine," said Harry, getting his card, another Increase Time Spell. "First I'll play a Summoning Charm." Harry watched the five cards that the table dealt to him: another Hippogriff, another Increase Time Spell, and... three Dumbledores! Harry could have dropped dead right then. Three Dumbledores! What were the odds of that happening? Probably just about as good as getting four Dumbledores in the first place....

"Come on! Let's go!" said Malfoy sounding anxious to get the game over with.

"I'm going to start off by playing two Increase Time Spells," announced Harry, now having a total of three actions. "Then I will play three Dumbledores!"

"Three Dumbledores!" yelled Malfoy and Ak together. Harry watched as their eyes widened as the three Dumbledores appeared next to the one he already had out.

“And now since you don’t have the Constant Vigilance Potion anymore,” continued Harry, feeling as though he was on a winning streak, “I gain control of your Ultimate Voldemort too!”

“What are we going to do now, Ak?” asked Malfoy through clenched teeth as their Voldemort disappeared and then reappeared on Harry and Hermione’s side, now under their control.

“Don’t worry, something will turn up.”

“I don’t see how,” grinned Harry. “Your turn now, Malfoy.”

“I know,” he spat as he got his card. Malfoy’s face turned from being disgusted and all scrunched up to a grin. “For my first action, I’ll play another Imperius Spell, on good old Ultimate Voldemort.”

“Well, it was nice having him for a while,” said Harry as they lost their massive monster. “But at least we still have the four Dumbledores.”

“And now I’ll put out another Constant Vigilance Potion to stop anything like that from ever happening again,” said Malfoy, summoning another cauldron.

“Don’t worry,” said Hermione. “This battle won’t be long enough for us to try and steal that Ultimate Voldemort again. It’s going to be over very soon.”

“How so?”

“Because I’m going to use a Merging Spell on Harry’s four Dumbledores!”

Instead of four snakes coming out of the spell, four ghost-like spirits did. They each grabbed a hold of a Dumbledore and flew together, forming the same giant blob. It wiggled and jiggled and flashed colors, then grew to the same size as the Ultimate Voldemort. When the blob turned into the regular form, it didn’t look all too different from what a normal Dumbledore would. It didn’t have any extra limbs, it was just much taller, and had a very bright glow all around him.

“And now I’ll use an Engorgio Charm on him, to make him even stronger!”

“Now our two fighters are evenly matched,” said Ak, beginning his turn.

“I don’t think so, Dumbledore will always be more powerful,” said Harry.

“So, to begin my turn, I’m going to attack with Ultimate Voldemort.”

“But if you attack Ultimate Dumbledore, they’ll both be discarded,” said Harry. “Both Ultimate Voldemort’s and Ultimate Dumbledore’s powers are equal.”

“That’s why I’m not attacking him,” said Ak. “I’m going to attack Hermione instead.”

“Oh no! That will practically beat her!” exclaimed Harry.

“Yeah, too bad it won’t beat her now. We’ll actually have to wait another turn...” said Ak as Ultimate Voldemort attacked Hermione’s deck, and brought it down to only two cards. This was getting close; if only she hadn’t used those Maherius Curses on herself!

“I’m going to begin my turn by attacking the Ultimate Voldemort with my Ultimate Dumbledore!” said Harry, wanting to eliminate the threat that it could beat Hermione.

Dumbledore took out his wand from his pocket and pointed it at Voldemort who did the same. For a second, the two giant fighters faced each other, wands out and ready to go. Then, a moment later, they both shot the same black beam out of their wands at each other, creating a massive, holographic explosion that filled the entire table’s surface. When it cleared, both fighters were down on the ground, and disappeared shortly after.

“Now we’re both fighter-less and even,” said Harry.

“Yeah, the only difference is that both of the members on our team have more than two cards in their deck,” mocked Malfoy.

“Okay okay, I’ll just play a Hippogriff and a house elf,” said Harry lazily, just wanting to get something out so that he couldn’t be attacked directly.

“And to try and counter that, I’ll play a Dementor and a Boggart,” said Malfoy. “All I have to do is wait a turn, attack with them, and Granger’s gone. We win, even without Ultimate Voldemort!”

“Don’t get too cocky,” said Hermione, getting her card. “Because you never know when the tables might turn on you.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah,” said Hermione sternly. “Because for my first action, I’m going to play an Apparition Spell!”

“No!” yelled Malfoy and Ak together.

“What does that do?” asked Harry.

“It switched two player’s decks,” grinned Hermione. “And I’m going to switch my one card deck with Malfoy’s.” The two decks in the slots for Hermione and Malfoy disappeared in puffs of smoke and then reappear in opposite places. “Now for the finishing move! I’m going to use my final action to play a Maherius Curse on Malfoy, defeating him and beating his team!”

“No! That can’t be!” yelled Ak and Malfoy together, in disbelief of their loss. Amidst a little cheering and pats on the back from the crowd, some holographic fireworks went off on Harry and Hermione’s side of the table and all the fighters and items on the surface of it disappeared.

“Nice going, Hermione,” grinned Harry, removing his deck from the table’s slot. “So you were planning on doing that all along, by weakening yourself, eh?”

“Yep,” she smiled back.

“Well, good game Ak... Malfoy,” said Harry to his opponents. Ak bowed back to him, but Malfoy only gave him a look of pure venom, ripped his deck out of the slot, and stormed out of the room, pushing anyone who was in his way to the side.

“What’s his problem?” asked Ak, the people around the table beginning to disperse.

“He really wanted to beat you, Harry,” said Ginny, walking up with her brother to the three of them. “That’s the whole reason he started playing Wizard Duel again, to get revenge on you.”

“I didn’t know you played, Ginny,” said Hermione.

“Yeah... it’s an okay game. In fact, I was the one who suggested using it to get back at you, Harry.”

“Oh thanks, Ginny!” said Harry. “Kill our friendship even more.”

“Trust me,” she said, looking at Harry sharply. “You two’s friendship is about as killed as it can be right now. Besides, beating you in a little Wizard Duel game is better than what he was suggesting: a nighttime assassination.”

“Well then, thank you Ginny,” said Harry as she started walking out of the room. “And... one more thing.”

“Yeah?” she asked, turning around.

“Could you tell Malfoy that... I’m sorry?”

“Tell him you’re sorry?” she ask, scrunching her face up a little. “You’re sorry for leaving him to die...? Sure, I’ll try, but I’m not making any guarantees.”

“Thanks Ginny,” said Harry. If he could only try and get Malfoy back, there could be a chance that he couldn’t go totally over to Voldemort’s side. He was definitely very powerful, a little mentally unstable perhaps, but powerful, and would be a better ally than enemy. Harry shivered at the thought of going head to head with Malfoy in a death match, a real wizard duel.

“Good job there Harry!” came a familiar voice from behind. Harry turned around, and saw Dumbledore standing there, smiling.

“Professor Dumbledore!” exclaimed Harry. “What are you doing here?”

“Oh well, I thought I might as well witness the final Wizard Duel match this year,” he smiled, “and I must say I am very happy that I decided to. It was a great match indeed, and I much enjoyed seeing myself take on that Ultimate Voldemort.”

“You are a fine card, professor,” grinned Harry.

“Why thank you, Harry. But, I’m afraid I must leave you now; it seems as though others are in need of your services more than I.”

“What?” asked Harry, a little confused. Dumbledore grinned and pointed a long finger behind Harry. He turned around and saw behind him at least fifty students of all ages and all houses, each standing there looking at him. For a second, they all were silent, then they all broke into talking at the same time.

“Can I have your autograph!?”

“Will you trade your Dumbledore!?”

“Can I look through your deck!?”

Harry just smiled and tried to make them all happy. He was a star, Malfoy was his enemy... things were back to the way they used to be.

Chapter 26- The Disastrous Duel

Harry stayed at the Great Hall for several hours, trying to give everyone a personalized card of their choice, talking them out of trading his Dumbledores, and making them stop exalting him as the greatest player. Even Hermione got a little fame, though Harry noticed she left the room far earlier than he did.

It was well past midnight when Harry finally returned to his dormitory and woke up not too much later, having what felt like about a minute’s rest, ready to begin one of the hardest days of his life. It was going to start with the Dueling Club’s presentation at breakfast and then go into the Quidditch Final that night.

“Man, Harry,” said Ron the next morning at breakfast. “You look... tired.”

“Yeah, all those fans of mine drove me crazy last night,” sighed Harry, collapsing into his chair at the Gryffindor table.

“I don’t know why they all wanted your autograph,” said Ron, returning to his food. “After all, it was Hermione who won the game.”

“Yeah, only about ten people came to me after the match, but about five times more came to you,” whined Hermione.

“Well that’s because I was the one with the Dumbledores,” said Harry.

“But it wasn’t even you that merged them together to create the Ultimate Dumbledore,” she continued. “I did that!”

“The kids don’t care about who did the merging,” said Harry lazily. “All they care about is who was controlling the fighter... and that was me.”

“Well that’s not very fair,” she moaned again.

“Shh!” said Ron. “Professor Flitwick’s coming up to the front of the room. It’s almost time to begin the duel!”

“Oh no, not now...” sighed Harry. “I’m so tired....”

“Well you’d better wake up, because it’s time to duel.”

“Attention students! Attention!” announced Professor Flitwick. “Attention please! It is time for the Dueling Club to show off their skills to you all!”

It was easy to tell the members of the Dueling Club out of the rest of the students in the Hall. While everyone else was clapping and cheering, their heads were held down low, too tired to fight.

“This will be one of the most interesting matches so far in the history of the club, as it will involve all of you in this room.”

“Will it, Harry?” asked Ron amongst excited talk from everyone in the Hall.

“This was mostly his idea, not mine,” groaned Harry. “I think it’s a little... excessive, but it’s what he wanted.”

“If you would,” continued Flitwick, “I would ask for all of you that are members of the Club to step up here next to me, and everyone else to just stand up where you are.”

Harry, Ron, Hermione, and the rest of the Dueling Club stood up and walked up to the head of the room, and looked out at the rest of the school, all standing up at attention to them, with slightly confused expressions, wondering how they could all participate in the duel.

“Now, don’t be startled,” said Professor Flitwick, taking out his wand. “But you are all going to be encased in small, glass boxes and then float up to random points in the air in this room.”

“What!?” yelled everyone at once.

“Glassium Boxius Tutemae!” yelled Flitwick. A thousand clear ribbons erupted out of the tip of his wand, flying through the room, touching each person, and forming four glass walls around them, putting everyone into small glass boxes, just as Professor Flitwick had said. It was quite a spectacular sight, seeing all of them rise at different points in the air, each containing a different person with a different expression on his or her face: excitement, terror, it was all good.

“Now, duelers,” said Professor Flitwick, getting the member’s attention. “In a moment, you are all going to be transported to the top of one of those boxes, where you will begin the duel. You may move by jumping from the top of one box to the other, but no flying.” He looked at Harry sharply with that last comment, as if it only applied to him... which it pretty much did. “As before, if you touch the ground, you lose. So, try not to fall.”

“Anything you say, professor,” grinned Malfoy. Harry wondered what he meant... then it hit him. Malfoy could Apparate! He was going to be impossible to beat!”

“On the count of three, you will all be transported to your starting locations,” squeaked Flitwick, hovering in the air, getting ready to watch. “Good luck to you all, and I can’t wait to see who the victor shall be! Ready? Good. One... two... three! Go!”

This time there was no moment of black oblivion around Harry as he was transported. All that happened was one second he was facing Professor Flitwick and the next he was looking at him from almost forty feet in the air while standing on top of a glass box that contained some first year student he had never really seen before.

“Hey there Harry!” he yelled to him from inside the clear box.

“How is it in there?”

“Oh, it’s nice... a little hard to breathe, but okay I suppose.”

Suddenly, a read beam shot by Harry’s shoulder and nearly shaved the top of his school robe. He looked over and saw Joe bouncing up and down on another box, happy that he had almost hit Harry.

“Sorry,” said Harry to the kid in the box below him, “but I’ve got to go fight now.”

“Ha ha!” squealed Joe. “Meh almost hit you!”

“Notice the almost in that sentence,” commented Harry, jumping to another box closer to Joe. It was quite hard for Harry, leaping from the top of one box to another, and trying to keep his balance too. The urge to transform his shoulders into wings to help stay stable was almost overwhelming.

“Meh is going to beat you Harry!” squeaked Joe, even though it seemed as though he was trying to back away from Harry rather than get closer to him. He stopped on one box and fired another Stupefy at Harry, but missed as expected.

“You’d better come up with a new plan if you want to win,” said Harry, getting closer to him with every second. Harry tried not to look down, he knew that the fear of seeing just how high up he really was would be enough to make him fall.

“You know what,” said Joe, in a new, deeper voice that was almost scary. “I think you’re right. It is time for a new plan.” With that, he turned around and started leaping away on top of the boxes with much more confidence, almost as if he were floating through the air rather than jumping. There just wasn’t something right about it....

“Hey! Where are you going!” yelled Harry to him, trying to keep up. Harry pitied the people he was stepping on, it must have been very annoying to have people constantly stepping on your head, even if it was beneath a thick layer of magical glass. It wasn’t too long before Harry caught up with Joe and grabbed his shoulder with his hand.

“Let go of me!” he yelled in the same, horrible voice as he turned his head around. Harry almost jumped back in fear when he saw Joe’s eyes. They were all white, except for a few red veins at the bottom, as if they had rolled right back into his head. Then Harry finally understood what was going on... it was the same as before. Joe had been taken over by someone else!

“I said let go!” he yelled again, shoving Harry down onto the top of another box. He did it with such force that Harry slid off of the box and began falling down to the floor. Just as he realized that this was happening, Harry made a grab for the glass box and got a hold of the top, but just barely. He was holding on with all of his might, looking directly at the person in the box. Sadly, it was a Slytherin.

“Fall fall fall!” Harry heard the boy about his age inside the box yell as he tried to pull himself back up. It took a minute, but Harry finally got back on top of the box, and quickly looked at where Joe was. He noticed that he was not alone, Mike was with him, and Chris was coming in too. The same person must have taken them over again, since the same strategy was being utilized, but who could be doing it?

Harry scanned the room for a sign of anyone that might be able to control all of them at once. Ernie was already in the loser’s box and so was Neville. But, Malfoy had already told Harry that those two were incapable of performing the curse anyways. Who else could possibly be doing it? Suddenly, Harry saw who Chris, Mike, and Joe’s target was: Hermione, the same as before. She was skipping along on the surface of some boxes, in the opposite direction that they were coming at her in. If Harry didn’t do something quick, they would get her Bracelet.

“Why Hello, Harry,” came Malfoy’s voice from behind.

“I don’t have time for you right now, Malfoy,” seethed Harry, not even turning around, but running away from him as fast as he could. He could hear Malfoy’s footsteps behind him....

Then it suddenly hit him! Why hadn’t he thought of it before? Malfoy must be the one controlling them! He was certainly powerful enough, and knew enough Dark Magic. All this time, he must have just been on a mission from Voldemort. If he could just beat him, then he wouldn’t have to worry about beating the others... but he had to do it quickly!

“Stupefy!” yelled Harry, quickly spinning around and aiming right for Malfoy. He didn’t appear surprised or shocked in the least. He merely ducked down and avoided the beam, grinning at Harry.

“You know what, Potter,” he said. “We both know that it’s going to probably come down to the two of us again... why don’t we just settle it here and now?”

“Sounds fine to me,” said Harry. This would go perfectly with his plan... as long as he defeated Malfoy quickly, and not the other way around. Going over every spell in his mind as fast as he could, Harry quickly selected a starting move.

“Porcini Magus!” he yelled, aiming straight at Malfoy. It was the same spell that Aylar had used on him last year, and now, because they had spent all year in Transfiguration learning about transforming others, he could perform it.

The pinkish beam flew through the air, straight at Malfoy, aimed perfectly. It hit him right in the chest, making a pink glow expand from there to all over his body. It brought him down on all fours and quickly shrunk him down to the size of a young pig. Once he was the correct dimensions, the rest of the pig’s body became visible: first the ears, then the curly tail, and the rest was done almost instantly. Where Malfoy had been only moments before, there was now a cute little piglet.

“I think I win,” grinned Harry, amazed that he had beaten Malfoy so quickly.

“Not so fast!” came a voice in Harry’s head. It was the Animagus’ telepathic talk, and it wasn’t Ron or Hermione’s voice... it was Malfoy’s!

“What do you mean?” telepathed Harry back to him. “You can’t fight! You’re a little pig now!”

To this, Malfoy merely laughed.

“Don’t you know that you can’t transform a Polymagus like that?” he said. “All I have to do now is transform back to my human form!” The small pig flashed a peachy color, and an instant later, Malfoy was back in his normal form, his arms folded and having a smug look on his face.

“You’re going to have to do better than that, Potter,” he grinned.

Harry was becoming impatient. This was not going along with his plan at all. He looked behind him quickly and saw that Joe, Mike, Chris, and now Akshay were only a few boxes away from Hermione. Malfoy could wait, he had to help her now!

Not saying anything to Malfoy, Harry spun around and sprinted off in her direction, leaping from box to box like stones on a river, not daring to look at the ground below, just keeping his eyes on the target. As fast as the four of them were, they were no match for Harry in his Gryffin form. He transformed everything except his head and the wings, looking like some sort of horrible freak, but still being able to outrun any human.

“Get away from her!” growled Harry to them, being only a few boxes away. The four of them turned their faces around and they were definitely a terrifying sight. All of them had their eyes rolled back in their heads, and were bearing sinister smiles of victory.

“You three get her!” commanded Joe, in his horrible voice. “I’ll take care of lion-boy over here.” Mike, Chris and Akshay continued heading in for Hermione while Joe took out his wand and aimed it right at Harry.

“Stupe- AAAHHH!” he yelled as Harry suddenly leapt from where he was and pounced right on top of him, bringing him down onto a very large box, one that contained an especially large student. Harry pinned him down, grabbed his wand out of his hand with his teeth and then threw Joe over the side of the box, making him fall all the way to the ground. When he was just a matter of inches away from impact, he immediately disappeared and reappeared at the other end

of the room, in a larger version of the glass boxes that contained several students, all of whom had been defeated. It was this duel's version of the loser's area.

Now that he was out of the way, Harry turned his attention back to the other three, and saw that they were on the same box as Hermione now, but she was still oblivious to them. Chris was taking out his wand, ready to strike.

Having no time for anything else, Harry put all the strength he had into one leap. He brought his part-human, part-Gryffin body as far down as he could, as if charging it up, then let it loose into the air, flying over at least twenty boxes and almost fifty feet. Just as he was about to fall right on top of Akshay, Harry stopped right where he was in midair.

It was a very odd feeling, as if someone had just shut off all of the gravity in the room. But, just then, Harry realized that not everything else in the room was standing still like he was, it was all moving in one direction. He wasn't floating in midair, he was being sucked backwards!

"Ha ha ha, Harry!" laughed Malfoy again in Harry's mind. "If you thought I was tough to beat in my human form... remember me as the Surmanger?"

Harry looked behind him and saw the same horrible beast that he had fought at the end of the first Dueling Club meeting of the year. Malfoy had once again turned into the Surmanger and he was sucking up everything in the room into his own mouths. It was almost a beautiful sight, seeing all the glass boxes swirling and dancing around him, and if Harry's life hadn't been at stake, he would have taken more time to enjoy it.

But, Harry remembered, there was more than his life at stake here. If Hermione's Bracelet was stolen, and Voldemort got it... well, Harry didn't even want to think about that. As Harry held on for dear life to a clear box that was one of the further ones away from Malfoy at the moment, he looked around for where she and the three controlled kids were. He saw that they were being sucked in as well and were spinning around just as much as he was. They had evidently stupefied Hermione, seeing as her eyes were closed and she was putting up no fight against their struggles to try and pry the Bracelet off of her arm. But, every time they got close to her, the Surmanger would pull them in closer to itself, and pull them away from her, making them part of the swirling junk that was being slowly eaten.

The Surmanger was like a tornado, sucking in everything to its central point, where it was destroyed. Harry had to find some way to stop them from getting the Bracelet... but how? He couldn't fly over to them, or else he'd be instantly transported to the loser's bin. From there, he could do nothing but wait for them to win. Besides flying, there was no other way to get to them. Before Harry could do anything, he had to beat Malfoy.

"Malfoy!" he yelled to him in his mind. "Why are you doing this!?"

"Because I want to win, you idiot!" he yelled back, the Surmanger's body vibrating slightly with every syllable.

"I don't mean why did you transform," said Harry back, the thoughts in his minds almost being drowned out by the insanely loud howling sound of Malfoy sucking in everything. "I mean why are you trying to get the Bracelet? Do you love Voldemort that much!?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said back. "But I do know that in a matter of minutes, I will win this duel. The Surmanger is invincible! It devours all spells! Nothing can harm it!"

Malfoy was beyond reason. He was even more powerful than Harry thought, being able to control the three of them and hold his transformation at the same time. He was definitely not going to win this battle by talking, that was for sure. He had to fight. But what could he do? As much as Harry hated to admit it, Malfoy was right. He learned from their last duel together that the Surmanger was invincible to every spell.

“It has to have some weakness,” thought Harry, trying to remember every spell he’d ever learned, every second getting closer and closer to one of Malfoy’s many mouths. ‘But, the only way to beat it is... is by there is no way to beat it! The only way to win is to be Malfoy, because he is going to win!’

For second, it was as if a fuse was going off in Harry’s mind. There was a few seconds of sizzling, then an explosion. He figured out how he could do it! The only way to win was to become Malfoy... and that’s just what he would do!

“ANATA NARU!” Harry yelled as loud as he could. Harry remembered back to the beginning of the year, at his first Spell Invention class when Dumbledore was showing off the MMSC of one of his new spells, the spell that allows you and one other to exchange bodies. Harry remembered that Dumbledore mentioned he had even made it an unavoidable spell, so not even the mighty Surmanger could defend against it.

A white flash filled the room for a second, then disappeared just as quickly. Then, everything in the room stopped moving, as if frozen in time. But, Harry saw that not everything had stopped; there was some smoke coming out of the Surmanger, as if it was a spirit of some sort. Harry looked up and saw that the same thing was happening to him. A gas-like spirit was flowing out of each of them and into the other’s. Harry’s spirit flew into Malfoy’s, and Malfoy’s flew into his.

The next thing Harry knew, he was on the ground, looking at every direction at once, through dozens of eyes. It was horrible, being able to see above, below, left, right, back and front all at the same time. Harry tried to concentrate on being human again, what having only two eyes was like. An instant later, he was back in his floating human form...though not his, Malfoy’s.

Harry looked himself over... yes, he was definitely Malfoy. The spell had worked! He didn’t really feel any different, though, just a little shorter perhaps. Harry looked up, and saw that everything in the room that had been swirling around him earlier was now quickly falling to the ground since the force that had just been pulling on them stopped. The boxes, members, everything was collapsing. Amongst it all, Harry saw... himself, only with Malfoy’s spirit inside of his. The transformation must have taken him by such a surprise, that it had knocked him out, because Harry saw that his eyes were closed.

“Wait a minute,” said Harry out loud, in Malfoy’s voice. It was odd at first, hearing a different voice come out when you expected the one that you’re used to. But, Harry quickly got over it. “If I... er, Malfoy in my body touches the ground, I’ll lose! I’ve got to transform back!”

Harry mumbled the spell again, and the room flashed white. Time stopped for an instant and the gas-like sprits exchanged bodies again, returning to their original owners. Harry didn’t feel anything really during the transformation, just a small happiness that he was reuniting his original body and soul.

“Woah!” yelled Harry when he suddenly realized that he was back where he was and falling through the air. He quickly grabbed a hold a falling box, and climbed on top of it, though it would not provide much protection when he hit the ground. Just to be sure, Harry looked down and saw that Malfoy’s unconscious spirit had been transferred back into his original body and he fell to the ground, just like Harry was about to do, and was transported away.

The boxes and the people inside hit the floor with a fantastic crash that caused the entire room to shake as if there had been a massive earthquake. Even though none of the glass boxes broke, because they were magic, they still fell over and gave the people inside them quite a scare.

“Now we can get that Bracelet!” Harry heard Akshay yell in the same, horribly deep and scratchy voice that Joe had. Remembering why he had traded bodies with Malfoy for that instant

in the first place, Harry reminded himself that he had to stop them from stealing Hermione's Bracelet.

Harry jumped off of the box he had stood on and then onto the floor, ready to run over and help her out. But, just as his feet touched the hard surface, he was instantly transported over to the loser's bin. Even though everything had fallen, it still didn't change the rule that you couldn't touch the ground.

"NO!" yelled Harry, pressing his face up against the glass wall of the loser's area. After all that he had just overcome, he had been beaten by a single, stupid mistake. All he could do now was watch. Akshay, Mike and Chris were each jumping from fallen box to fallen box, working their way to Hermione's body that was lying on top of a pile of glass boxes and other obstacles.

"I've got to get back out there!" Harry yelled to the others in the room. He saw that everyone except for the four out in the playing field was in here now.

"No... you lost," said Seamus.

"Yeah, once you lose, you can't really go back out," sighed Ginny.

"No, you don't understand!" screamed Harry. "I have to get back out there!"

"Why?" asked Justin Finch-Fletchley.

Harry breathed hard. What could he say? He had to stop three students under a controlling curse from stealing Hermione's magical Bracelet so that they can't give it to Voldemort so he can't control the universe? No... there was no way.

Harry returned to looking through the glass wall and out on the field. Chris was right at Hermione now and was summoning the Bracelet off of her arm. It flew through the air for a second and then right into his hand. He grabbed his wand out of his pocket and tapped the Bracelet with it, making it disappear into thin air.

Voldemort now had the Bracelet.

Harry banged his head and fists against the wall, almost putting a crack in it, despite that fact that it was supposed to be indestructible. He saw that Chris, Akshay, and Mike each suddenly snapped out of their catatonic phases. Both Akshay and Mike fell off of their boxes from the shock and were teleported to the same room as Harry. Only Chris was left, and he was proclaimed the winner of the duel.

Harry banged his fist on his forehead so hard that he thought he put a hole in it. Now, his Ring was all that stood between life as they knew it right now and Voldemort taking over the world.

Chapter 27- A Tried Tie

"I can't believe it..." Harry said to himself quietly as the loser's area was slowly lowered to the ground by Professor Flitwick. "Voldemort has the Watch evidently, he must have somehow stolen the Stone too, and now he has the Bracelet. If he gets the Glove from Dumbledore...."

"Let's all give a hand to our new Dueling Club champion... Chris Zimmermann!" announced a beaming Professor Flitwick as he made the walls around the loser's room disappear, and everyone filed out into the Hall. He was standing next to Chris and holding his arm in the air, like a referee would do with a boxing champion.

“I must say, Chris,” he continued, “that I don’t think anyone here expected a second year to win.”

“All I know is,” said Chris, looking a little confused, “is one second I was about to attack someone, and then the next I’m standing on top of a pile of magical glass boxes, being proclaimed the winner!”

“Ah yes,” sighed Professor Flitwick happily. “That’s what they all say. Time really flies when victory is at hand.”

Harry took a deep breath. If only that were the truth... only he knew what had really happened, Malfoy had taken control of him and the other lot of Gryffindor second years. Even though it seemed impossible now that he had shown his true colors in battle, Harry had to try and bring Malfoy back to his side. It was his only hope of getting the Bracelet back.

“Why don’t we have the Dueling Club captain, Harry Potter, come on up here and give little Chris here some congratulations,” suggested Flitwick. “I have to go clean up this Hall anyway, hopefully no one in the boxes got too hurt.”

“Nice job, Chris,” said Harry, not really paying attention to him and scanning the room for Malfoy as he shook Chris’ hand.

“Thanks Harry,” he said back, still looking a little dazed. “But I have to say, it doesn’t really feel like I’ve won.”

“Yeah, that’s good,” said Harry, practically ignoring him and spotting Malfoy over Chris’ shoulder. He was sitting on the floor behind the crowd and rubbing his head, probably still recovering from the battle. After all, it’s not every day that you switch bodies with someone.

“Excuse me Chris,” said Harry, not looking at him, ducking as Flitwick flew overhead, rapidly fixing up the Great Hall, and making the glass boxes around everyone disappear. A few other teachers filed in too, to help him out. “But I’ve got something to do.”

“Yeah, no problem Harry. I’ll see you down at the field in a little while.”

Harry walked through the crowd, making his way to Malfoy, trying to decide what emotion he should be feeling, and what expression he should be wearing. He didn’t want to sound angry, then Malfoy would never come back to his side. But, he didn’t want to sound too loving either, then Malfoy would just shove him off. When he finally got right in front of him, Harry just said the first thing that came to mind.

“Hello Malfoy,” he said in his most bland voice possible. Malfoy looked up at him from his seat on the floor, and took his hand off of his head. He stood up, brushed himself off, put his hands to his side, and glared at Harry.

“What do you want?” he hissed.

“So...” Harry said, trying to come up with something, “at least I didn’t win, eh?”

“What do you want?” he demanded again.

“I want to know why you had those four second years steal Hermione’s Bracelet during the match,” said Harry coolly, trying his hardest not to sound nearly as angry as he was feeling.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Malfoy, not even looking at Harry and shaking his head. He was looking around the room, in search of something. “But I have to go see Ginny now, so... go away.”

“Wait! Malfoy!” Harry called after him as he walked away.

“LISTEN!” he seethed to Harry, turning around. “I don’t like you anymore Harry! I don’t want to talk to you, I don’t even want to be near you! So will you please... just... go away!?” He didn’t say anything else, just turned around, and pushed his way through the crowd, trying to find Ginny.

“Oh yeah?” Harry yelled to him, letting some of his anger come out, trying to get back at Malfoy, even though he knew he was not very good with comebacks. “Well... yeah, you... um... you don’t smell good! Yeah... you know it.”

Harry stormed away, appalled and fuming. Malfoy was his only hope of getting the Bracelet back and now it was gone forever. What could he do?

“Hey Harry!” Ron called over to him. “That was a fun match, are you sure you don’t want to take credit for coming up with it?”

“Go away Ron,” Harry said to him, not wanting to deal with anything right now.

“What’s your problem?” asked Ron.

Harry sighed.

“Hermione’s Bracelet was stolen during the match.”

“Who took it?” Ron asked, lowering his voice slightly.

“Chris.”

“Chris?” questioned Ron. “Him? Well why don’t you just get it back from him!?”

“It’s too late,” Harry moaned. “He somehow teleported it to Voldemort during that match.”

“But...” stuttered Ron. “Why?”

“It’s the same thing as in the two previous duels,” said Harry lazily. “Someone else was controlling them, making them try and steal it for him or her. During a Dueling Club match is the perfect time to make a grab for it. You wouldn’t be able to tell dueling from robbery.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Ron, looking confused. “You mean they’ve tried to steal her Bracelet before?”

Harry could have hit himself in the head. But, it hurt enough from banging it on the glass walls, so he decided against it. He just realized that Ron had never been present at the times during the other duels when the second years had tried to steal Hermione’s Bracelet, and he had never bothered to tell him afterwards.

“Yeah,” said Harry, trying to make up for two duel’s worth of explanations. “Back when Malfoy was our friend, he told me that the curse used on them was a very advanced version of the Imperius Curse; a spell that only Voldemort and his close followers know.”

“So then we know who’s been doing it,” said Ron in an obvious tone of voice. “Malfoy controlled them! Especially now.”

“I know...” said Harry, still not really wanting to believe it. “I tried to get him to come back to our side and give it back, but he’s not budging.”

“Well, personally I don’t really blame him,” said Ron quietly, then seeing the look on Harry’s face, changed the subject. “I guess we’ll just have to figure out another way to get it back.”

“Harry! Ron!” yelled Hermione suddenly, evidently out of her unconscious state. Harry looked over and saw Professor Flitwick leaning over her, he must have just finished bringing her back. Now that he had the chance, Harry looked around the rest of the room, and observed that the Great Hall looked brand new. All the glass boxes were gone and everyone that had been inside them were walking around, bearing different expressions: some terrified, some dazed, some beaming, and others will still hobbling around. It was a good thing Harry defeated Malfoy quickly, or else the room would have been in the same condition that it was after the first duel: dead.

“What is it?” Ron asked, walking over to her. Harry followed behind, knowing what she was going on about.

“My Bracelet!” she exclaimed, jumping up onto her feet and pointing to her empty wrist. “It’s... it’s gone!”

“We know...” sighed Harry, not wanting to think about it any longer. He decided just to give it all to Hermione at once. “During the match, Chris was being controlled and he stole it and then teleported it to Voldemort. There, that’s what happened.”

“But... I want it back...” she whimpered, staring directly at Harry.

“We’re trying,” said Ron, putting his arm around her.

“Well we have to try harder!” she said sternly. “We need to take action! Why don’t we tell Dumbledore, he’ll know what to do! I’m sure he can get it back.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” said Harry, wondering why he hadn’t thought of that. “We can go tell him now.” But, Harry began to think, what if Dumbledore then wanted his Ring? Since that is now the only item remaining for Voldemort to acquire besides the Glove, Dumbledore may want it to be more heavily protected. The thought of parting with the Ring was far more than Harry could bear. Maybe they shouldn’t tell Dumbledore... right now anyways.

“You know guys,” said Harry, looking at his Ring. “Maybe we shouldn’t tell Dumbledore.”

“What!?” exclaimed Ron and Hermione together. “Why not?”

“Well,” said Harry, looking around and seeing that almost everyone else had already left, probably heading down to the Quidditch field early to get a good seat for the final match. “You know, Dumbledore has done so much for us, and put up with so much... maybe it would be better to just not put yet another burden on him.”

“You’re talking crazy, Harry,” said Ron, looking at him questioningly.

“And besides,” Harry continued, now looking at his Ring. It was so beautiful... almost as much- no, just as much as Cho. “We have to go to the Quidditch game soon, Ron, and we don’t want to be late for that.”

“I know what’s going on...” said Ron more seriously than Harry had ever heard him talk before. “That Ring has taken you over somehow... just like that curse put on Chris. It’s not Harry Potter talking, it’s just the stupid Ring.”

“Now cool it you two...” said Hermione, though neither Harry or Ron heard her. They were both staring right at each other, with feelings of hatred flowing through both that neither had ever experienced for the other ever before.

“Maybe you should give me the Ring!” yelled Ron. “At least I wouldn’t put it above the lives of everyone in the world!”

“Are you kidding!” yelled Harry back even louder. His mind was no longer his, the Ring had taken over. “With how poor you are, I’m sure you’d just sell it to the first person who offered you a Sickle for it!”

“Why you little!” screamed Ron, tearing his wand out of his pocket and aiming it right at Harry. “Stupefy!” he shouted, just as Harry took out his wand and yelled the same spell. The two red beams met in midair and exploded into a fiery blaze, blowing them both backwards.

“You’re going to pay for that!” yelled Harry, jumping back up onto his feet. “Oh wait, I forgot... you can’t!”

“APOYIOSI!” screamed Ron, not even bothering to give a comeback. Harry wasn’t ready for such a powerful spell from him. There was an invisible explosion at his feet, and Harry was sent flying backwards, until he hit the wall with a tremendous force.

“Hah!” yelled Ron, with a horrible look of pleasure on his face. “It looks like there’s going to be another crack for Flitwick to fix up! Come on Harry, fall down! Let’s see if the hole you made is shaped like a lightning bolt, just look your hideous scar!”

Feeling more enraged than ever in his life, Harry exploded into his Gryffin form, and shot down at Ron like a missile. He went so fast, that when Harry collided with Ron, they slid all the way to the other side of the room on the floor, Ron's body making a terrible squeaking sound all the way.

“Get ready to eat claw, redhead boy!” telepathed Harry as he raised a paw with fully extended knife-like claws into the air, ready to bring it down on Ron’s terrified face. Just as he was about to begin slashing, Harry felt a force on his arm, preventing him from doing it. Harry looked up, and saw that Hermione had grabbed hold of his arm and was using all of her strength to keep him from using it.

“What the bloody hell do you think you’re doing!?” she demanded. Harry glared at her with his Gryffin face. She was stopping him from getting revenge, stopping him from finishing his prey, stopping him from... killing his best friend.

Harry immediately transformed back into his human form and stood up. Ron jumped to his feet, brushed himself off, and faced Harry. Hermione stood in the middle between them with a look of appalled shock on her face.

“What do you two think you’re doing?” she asked again, this time, less forcefully.

“I was-” said Ron.

“Shut up!” interrupted Hermione, putting her hand up. “There is absolutely no excuse for what you two did! If it wasn’t for that Disguise Dance coming up, I’d take off serious points for what I just saw. To think, after all you two have been through together that you would even think about doing what you just did. If I hadn’t stepped in, Harry, you may have killed Ron!”

“I... I know,” said Harry quietly, feeling his sanity being regained, as well as control over himself. “The Ring... it just, took me over there for a second.”

“Be that as it may,” continued Hermione, “you still need to learn how to control yourself. Even if you were under the Imperius Curse, I would expect that you two would care about each other enough to not even fight then. Now... just to affirm this, I want you two to shake hands.”

Knowing that Hermione’s wrath was definitely something to be feared, Harry and Ron walked up to each other and shook hands. Even with just that simple act, Harry could feel almost all of the friendship that had been taken out of them during the match flow back... though not entirely. What had come over them?

“Good,” she said when they let go, sounding satisfied. “Now, Harry, I think we should go see Dumbledore. It is the best course of action, I’m sure that you have to agree.”

“I suppose so...” said Harry, still not really wanting to, despite all that had just happened.

Suddenly, the doors of the Great Hall were thrown open, causing a massive crashing noise that rivaled what he and Ron were making earlier. Through the doors, Akshay came running in looking quite excited.

“Harry!” he yelled, when he reached the three of them, sounding a bit out of breath.

“What is it?”

“A package just came for you! It’s in the Gryffindor locker room!”

“What is it?” asked Ron.

“We don’t know,” said Akshay, gaining his breath back. “But it’s from Fred and George Weasley.”

“It’s from Fred and George?” questioned Harry, wondering what they could have possibly sent him. Then, he realized that this could be a great alibi to not see Dumbledore right away. “Well, that settles it, we can’t see the headmaster now, he’ll have to wait.”

“I still don’t think that sounds like too good of a plan,” said Ron, eyeing Harry curiously and suspiciously all over. Evidently, he wasn’t as quick to forgive about their little fight as Harry

was. Though, he couldn't blame him; Harry had said some pretty harsh things to him. "How about you and I, Harry, go down and see what you got, and then you, Hermione, go see Dumbledore and tell him what happened?"

"Alright," agreed Hermione.

"Fine," said Harry. At least he wouldn't have to give up his Ring immediately.

"Okay then," said Ron, looking a good deal happier. "Lead the way, Akshay!"

The four of them finally exited the Great Hall and went their separate paths: Hermione to Dumbledore's office, and Harry, Ron, and Akshay to the Gryffindor Quidditch team's room. It wasn't too long before they arrived there, and Harry saw the entire team huddled around a single bench with a present on it, talking excitedly and pondering what it could possibly be.

"Hey! Harry's finally here!" exclaimed Ak.

"Now he can open it!" said Joe.

"You mean, it was delivered here and not to my dormitory?" asked Harry, examining the long and thick package. It was wrapped up in brown paper and tied with a red ribbon and bow, just like a Muggle package would be. The only difference was that the return and send addresses were constantly changing colors and moving all around the package's surface.

"Yeah," said Mike. "Weird, huh?"

"Oh man," said Harry, picking it up. "I pity the owl that had to bring this one in. It's heavy!"

"Come on!" said Chris, bouncing up and down a little. "Open it already!"

"Don't you get cocky just because you won the duel today," said Harry to him sarcastically, trying to get into the happy mood all around him. "Alright already, I'll open it up."

Harry smiled and tore into the package, throwing the wrapping and ribbon into the air as a small child would at Christmas. Even though this was certainly an odd time and place to receive a gift, Harry knew that since it was from Fred and George, it had to be good. It took no time for Harry to finally reveal what was inside.

"Oh... my... god..." was all that Harry could say as he started wide-eyed at the treasure that lay before him. The entire team leaned in, oohing and aahing... just as lost for words as Harry was.

Fred and George had sent them six brand new Firebolts....

"Well what are you waiting for?" asked Harry, not taking his eyes off of the wonderful gift. It was as if the brooms were glowing, giving off an aura of greatness. "Take a broom everyone! One for each!"

There was a mad rush for the Firebolts, as if there wasn't enough for everyone. Ak, Chris, Mike, Akshay, Joe and Ron each held onto their new brooms as if they were small infants... small infants made of pure gold and diamonds. For one of the first few times ever, the entire Gryffindor changing room was silent; no one said a word as they practically drooled all over their new weapons, with which they would smite Slytherin.

"Hey look, Harry!" said Ron, pointing to the torn open package. "There's a note!"

Harry quickly snatched the small piece of parchment and read it out loud:

Harry,

We told you that we'd make up for our lousy Christmas present to you, didn't we? But seriously, we heard about your last match against Hufflepuff, and we don't want that to happen again to you! No more losing allowed! Supplying your team with a new batch of Firebolts is the only way me and George figured this to be possible. So, with a little cheating on inventory here

and there, and using a lot of Leprechaun's Gold to fool Percy for a little while, we managed to scrape up enough cash to get them for you. Enjoy... though not so much that your life is perfect and you'll never need to be cheered up by us again!

Don't lose... please,
Fred and George

"Wow," said Harry after finishing the letter. That was all he could say, what else was there to? Fred and George had just spent an unimaginable sum of money on him... what could you say to something like that?

"I guess business must be going pretty well for them if they can afford to buy us these," said Ron, still eyeing his broom.

"Yeah, and just think of how badly we're going to crush Slytherin now. We're indestructible!"

"Yeah!" yelled everyone together, looking at their brooms still.

"Well come on everyone!" exclaimed Harry, grabbing his own Firebolt from his locker. "Why don't you go out now and test out your new brooms!"

"They're ours..." said Mike to himself.

"Our own Firebolts..." said Ak.

"My own Firebolt..." said Akshay.

"Yeah yeah, that's great," said Harry, looking at his watch and seeing that they didn't have much time before their game would begin. "But even though these new brooms are great, they could take a little getting used to. So, let's all go out and test them."

There was a wild rush for the door leading to the Quidditch Field. Everyone wanted to be the first to fly on the new broom. They didn't waste any time walking out the door; as soon as it was open, they all flew out into the air like planes taking off... though more like jets or rocket ships. Their speed was incredible!

Harry ran out after them, to see how they were handling the new equipment and saw that he had been dead wrong in his previous statement. As he looked up, holding his hand over his eyes to block out the blinding summer sun, he saw his six teammates soaring through the air as he had never seen anyone else before. They moved with such grace, agility and speed, you would have thought them to be a professional team, not a bunch of second years. All of them were beautiful blurs in the air, appearing to teleport rather than fly.

Harry let them fly around and get really used to their new brooms until the stadium started to really fill up. He didn't want anyone in the stands to tell Slytherin that the entire Gryffindor team was flying on Firebolts! Harry quickly called them all back into the changing room, where they all wore the same expression of bliss, and the same hairdo: blown backwards.

"Great job, team," beamed Harry to them all. "Great job. I can't wait to see how quickly we can beat Slytherin."

"Oh come on!" grinned Ron. "Let's not beat them too quickly... I want to let them suffer for a while."

"Do whatever you want," smiled Harry, feeling happier than he had in quite a while. "Just remember, even though we have different brooms, we're not a different team. I expect you all to still play as a team, but not just any team... the Gryffindor team!"

"Yeah!" cheered everyone, psyched up and ready to go.

"And here's the Gryffindor team!" Harry head Zabini announce. That was their signal to head on out to the Field. Not wanting to risk losing some of the team energy and spirit by saying

anything else, Harry kept quiet as they walked out through the doors again, entering a stadium full of cheers and applause. Even though Harry could hear the Slytherins booing, he didn't care. Watching his team slice through the air like flying knives was more than enough to beat them out.

"And what's this?" Zabini asked. "It seems as though the entire Gryffindor team is flying on... no, it can't be! They're all on Firebolts!"

Now the applause and cheering for Gryffindor far outweighed the Slytherin's scorns. They knew that victory was at hand.

"And now," continued Zabini, not as enthusiastically as he usually sounded, probably being hurt by the fact that his house team didn't stand a chance. "Let's all welcome the Slytherin team."

Even though they were going to be fighting a lost match, Harry had to admire Slytherin's spirit. Even after seeing that the entire opposing team was on superior brooms, they still cheered more loudly than any of the other houses booed, and the team flew out of their room with such energy and vigor, you'd think they were on Firebolts.

"And now will the captains," continued Zabini, trying to sound excited, "Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter, please shake hands while Madam Hooch brings out the balls."

Harry flew up to Malfoy very slowly and saw that he was doing the same. Malfoy just glared at him straight in the eyes as they flew closer together. The closer they got, the more Harry could almost feel Malfoy's hatred and anger radiating out of him. The two of them finally met in midair, but no hand shaking took place.

"Don't think that just because you're on better broom's you'll win," hissed Malfoy coldly. "I learned that lesson back in the second year."

"Come on Malfoy," sighed Harry. "Can't we at least shake hands?"

"Not until you show me."

"Show you what?"

"Show me... that you're sorry."

"Sorry for what?" asked Harry, feeling like he was playing twenty questions.

"What do you think!?" demanded Malfoy. "For leaving me to die in that pyramid, you idiot! Once you show me that you are truly sorry for that, then... and only then, will I shake your hand."

"But what can I do?" asked Harry. "What? Do you want me to bleed for you or something?"

"Use your brain," suggested Malfoy, backing up. "For once in your life." Before Harry could respond, Malfoy was too far away, back with the rest of his team. Harry just sighed, and backed up too, getting ready to begin the match.

"And now," announced Zabini in a much more energized tone of voice, "the Quidditch Final of Slytherin against Gryffindor will begin in... three... two... one... NOW!"

Madam Hooch let loose the Quaffle, and it shot up into the air, signaling the beginning of the match. Before anyone blinked, before anyone took a breath, Akshay was already on the ball, with Joe and Mike not too far behind.

"And it's Gryffindor in possession to begin the match," continued Blaise, trying his best to sound unbiased, though it was hard to not detect a small hiss in his voice when he talked about Gryffindor doing well. "Those Firebolts are really helping out the team... you can tell because if they didn't have them, Slytherin would have crushed them by now."

There was some cheering from the Slytherin stands, though it was not very confident. Harry wanted to go up there and beat Zabini with his broom for his stupidity and he probably

could. With how well the rest of his team was playing, Harry was almost not necessary, except to catch the Snitch towards the end.

“And Gryffindor scores, making the points stand at ten to nothing.”

“Nice job team!” yelled Harry, though he didn’t doubt for a second that couldn’t hear him. At the speeds they were soaring at, Harry would be surprised if they could even see him much less understand what he was saying.

“Enjoying your new broom, Ron?” asked Harry, flying over to his friend that was doing a few laps around the Gryffindor goals. It’s not like he had anything much better to do; just like Harry, he was becoming almost obsolete. The opposing team was so busy dealing with the Chasers and Beaters, they couldn’t even think about trying to make their own goals!

“Oh man, Harry!” exclaimed Ron, beaming. “I don’t know how I ever flew on that old Cleansweep before. This one makes you feel like you’re not even on a broom, just flying on your own power.”

“I know,” said Harry. “It’s great. I’ll have to thank Fred and George.”

“You can do that right after you step off the Hogwarts Express,” said Ron, doing one final lap around.

“How?”

“Remember Jamie?” asked Ron.

“How could I forget?”

“Well, she’s been working with Hagrid for the past few weeks, helping him perform his duties. While that’s been going on, I’ve been setting up a little reunion waiting outside on the platform. The entire family will be waiting there for her.”

“Wow Ron,” said Harry, amazed that his friend was able to arrange something like that. “How did you manage to get everyone there?”

“I just told them all individually to come there and that I had something great to show him... or her. As long as none of them communicated with each other about it, I’m safe.”

“Won’t they all see each other when they arrive?”

“Yeah, but by then it’s too late and Jamie’s already there.”

“Sounds good,” said Harry, suddenly seeing a shimmer of gold at the far other end of the field. “And I’ll talk to you later about it... I’ve got to go end this match.”

“See you!” called Ron to him, though his words were quickly drowned out by Harry speeding away, becoming aware again at how great his Firebolt was by everyone else getting theirs and being so happy. Just as Zabini announced that the score was now twenty to zero in Gryffindor’s favor, Harry could actually see the Snitch... and Malfoy in hot pursuit of it!

“Oh no you don’t!” said Harry, zooming off in his direction. “Get away from my Snitch!”

“I don’t see your name on it,” he said back, not looking at Harry, just at the Snitch that he was slowly but surely getting closer to.

“I’ll tell you what,” said Harry, “how about I’ll let you get the Snitch if you give back Hermione’s Bracelet.”

“Are you still going on about that bloody Bracelet?” asked Malfoy exasperantly, sounding almost tired. “Listen... I didn’t take it from her.”

“Like I believe you,” said Harry. “You were the only one in that room with enough power and knowledge to take control of the four second years, and make them take it from her.”

“Even though I could do it, I wouldn’t,” said Malfoy back. “I may be a Death Eater, but I still don’t want Voldemort to be immortal. Him having that much power would make us all useless, and he could dispose of us all. No, I’d rather have him powerful... yes, powerful but still mortal.”

“Then why are you a Death Eater anyway?” asked Harry, trying to delve a bit into Malfoy’s life and maybe figure out a way to become friends with him again. Just by talking, too, their bond was returning… not much, but some.

“Do you think I had any choice?” asked Malfoy, still not looking at Harry.

“What do you mean? Of course, you should have had a choice.”

“Well, if you consider death or being a Death Eater a choice, then yes, I did have one. But I was pushed into even that by… well, this isn’t the time or place to talk about this. Not during a match.”

“Oh come on Malfoy,” said Harry, hearing that his team had just gotten another ten points. “It’s times like this that are best for talking.”

“Well….” he said, still keep his eyes on the Snitch. “The only reason I’m a Death Eater is because of my dad. As you know, he’s even higher up in the hierarchy of Death Eaters than I. Voldemort wants all of his Death Eater’s family members to of course join as well, so when I was born I was immediately signed up to become one.”

“But why did your dad become a Death Eater?”

“Didn’t you know?” asked Malfoy. “Though… I suppose not. Why would you?”

“Know what?”

“Voldemort is my grandfather.”

Harry almost fell off of his broom right there. Voldemort was Malfoy’s grandfather? How could that be? Harry wondered if he should tell him that Voldemort was his grandfather as well….

“But,” stuttered Harry, “doesn’t that mean that you’re the heir of Slytherin?”

“Oh no,” he laughed. “It’s possible to remove the family benefits and disown somebody in your family magically. It strips them of all blood relation to you and leaves them with only your DNA. Basically, you are no longer related after using that spell.”

“But why did he do that?”

“That’s still a mystery,” he sighed.

Harry swallowed. He probably knew why Voldemort used that spell on Lucius Malfoy. There can only be one heir, and he wanted it to be Lily so she could get James for him. Maybe, one day, Harry could tell him that.

“And there’s still one more thing….” said Malfoy quietly, just as Harry heard that the score was now forty to zero.

“What is it?” asked Harry, coming a little closer to him, the team getting another ten points.

“It’s….”

“Yeah?”

“It’s….”

“Yeah!?”

“It’s… that the Snitch is right behind you!”

“What?” said Harry, confused as Malfoy shot right passed and over him, chasing after the Snitch that was not too far away. “He was just trying to distract me! Why that little….” Harry wasted no more time. He shot off right after Malfoy and quickly caught up with him, being on the superior broom.

While he was riding alongside Malfoy at speeds unimaginable, Harry looked at his arch rival. He saw so many things in those eyes… power, intelligence, cunning… but just as visible was hunger, a sadness. Despite all that Malfoy had, and was probably going to get in his life, they

were all ill gotten gains. They all served the purpose of darkness and evil, and got man and wizardkind nowhere. If only there was something Harry could do to just... cheer him up.

Harry looked ahead, and saw the Snitch, no more than a few feet in front of them, keeping a good ways ahead of them, going just as fast. But, if Harry just slowed down a bit, Malfoy could easily speed ahead and grab it, winning the game and giving himself and the entire Slytherin house glory like they had never experienced in the past six years.

But, he thought again, Malfoy would certainly know that he backed out and let him win. That would bring the house glory, yes, but only take away what little Malfoy had left. If Harry wanted any hope of every being an ally with him again, he couldn't let him win... but what could he do?

Then it hit him. Harry went over in his mind the numbers again, and it worked out. In their first match against Ravenclaw, Gryffindor had won with one hundred and sixty points. Then, in their match against Hufflepuff, they had lost with one hundred and forty points, giving them a total of three hundred points. Now, Slytherin had beaten Hufflepuff in their first match with a whopping two hundred and seventy points, and creamed Ravenclaw with two hundred and thirty, giving them a total of five hundred. Since Gryffindor now had fifty points, their team had a grand total of three hundred and fifty, so if Harry caught the Snitch, they would have five hundred... the same as Slytherin! There would be a tie! Harry, giving up his house's and his own honor to give an equal amount to an enemy's... if that didn't make Malfoy finally believe that Harry was sorry, nothing would.

Harry instantly shot forward on his broom, beating Malfoy to the Snitch. Harry was no more than an inch away from it, his hand already going for it when Zabini made another announcement.

“And Gryffindor scores another ten points.”

“NO!” yelled Harry. But, it was too late. His fingers were already clasped around the Snitch, and the game was over. Gryffindor had won, and Malfoy was now gone forever

Chapter 28- The Costumes Come Off

“No!” yelled Harry again, though he could barely hear himself over the screaming from the crowd. “No! I didn’t want to catch it then! I don’t want to win! I don’t want to win! Malfoy... please.”

“Go away Potter,” he hissed, flying slowly down to the rest of his team. “Go away.”

“No! I wanted to tie! Malfoy... please listen!”

But all of Harry’s yelling was in vain. He was beckoned down to the ground by his fellow teammates and they didn’t want to hear anything that Harry had to say about trying to tie. All they wanted to do was to march right up to the Gryffindor common room and party all night long.

“And Gryffindor wins,” announced Zabini in an especially monotone and dispirited voice as Harry’s team carried him on their heads and shoulders all the way up to their room. “Final score: two hundred and ten to zero.”

Harry’s group grew as they went along, more and more Gryffindors were joining them, congratulating Harry on his quick catch of the Snitch, the expertise of the rest of his team, and asking where the Firebolts came from. But Harry didn’t want to hear any of it. He wanted to be set down and then run off to the Slytherin common room, to try and explain to Malfoy what

happened. With things they way they were right now, the Bracelet, along with the other Items, were Voldemort's. Not only did that mean that he was dangerously close to completing the potion, but also the last two Ingredients he needed were at Hogwarts. The entire school was in trouble! They were all in danger of an attack!

“Let’s have another three cheers for our awesome Quidditch team!” announced Joe Bob, the Head Boy, when they finally arrived at the common room. “Hip hip!”

“Hooray!” cheered everyone.

“Hip hip!”

“Hooray!”

“HIP HIP!”

“HOORAY!”

“Yes, that’s very nice,” said Harry, wanting to make a quick exit. “But you see-”

“Can we come in?” interrupted a few assorted Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw students, standing outside the open door to the common room. They had evidently followed them here, wanting to join in on the party.

“Absolutely not!” exclaimed Joe Bob, slamming the door in their faces.

“I think we should put up some more security than just that,” said Megan, the fifth year prefect.

“I believe you’re right,” grinned Joe Bob, taking out his wand. He pointed it at the door. “Exclusio Everyone!” The entire door flashed white and glowed a bright yellow for a moment until it returned back to its normal colors. “That ensure that no one else comes in... or goes out for that matter.”

“Mandatory party all night!” screamed about half of the people in the room, suddenly bursting into a loud, crazy crowd of people. Large tables that were full of food appeared out of nowhere. Gryffindor banners, red and gold streamers and sparkles fell from the ceiling. Music was coming from everywhere at once, resulting in some of the loudest Harry had ever heard, and then, propped up on a very tall, marble pedestal in the middle of the room was the Quidditch Cup that someone else on the team must have brought up already. From that point on, Harry had no hope of talking to Malfoy.

“Oh no!” said Hermione in a worried tone of voice. “I was going to try and fit in some extra studying tonight! Exams are in a week!”

“I know,” sighed Harry, barely hearable above the intense noise going on in the room. “I was going to try and talk to Malfoy... but now there’s no hope of that happening.”

“Why would you want to do that?” she asked, the both of them slowly moving as far away as possible from the crowd, which wasn’t very far at all seeing as the entire Gryffindor house was gathered there at once.

“He’s our only link to what’s going on with Voldemort,” whispered Harry, having to lean in so close just to be hearable that his lips were a matter of millimeters away from her ear. “If anyone could get your Bracelet back, it’s him... especially since he was the one who stole it in the first place.”

“Well then what are you waiting for!?” demanded Hermione, her eyes widening and her tone getting more imperative at the mentioning of her Bracelet. “Go talk!”

“I can’t...” groaned Harry. “Remember? Joe Bob sealed the door shut. I’ll have to wait until tomorrow to say even a word, and then I’ll have less luck than now... and my luck is slim to none.”

“Well then just go to bed,” she suggested. “The sooner you do, the sooner you can get up and talk to him. Besides, you’ve had a long and hard day... the Dueling Club, then the Quidditch final; you need your rest.”

“That’s about the best thing I’ve heard all day,” said Harry, suddenly feeling quite sleepy. “And I’ve heard ‘You won the Quidditch Final.’”

The last thing Harry saw before he trudged upstairs into his dormitory was Joe, wearing only his underwear and colorful drawings all over his body, swinging some sort of towel around his head from the top of the pedestal that the Cup was on, and then jumping off into the crowd, being carried from person to person, grunting random phrases unnecessarily loud. Harry just sighed and walked the rest of the way up to his room.

“What a day,” he sighed, his face collapsing into his pillow. “What a day....”

Despite all of Harry’s expectations, he did not make any progress with Malfoy the next morning at breakfast. Harry attempted to walk over to the Slytherin table, but each time he did, Malfoy shot him the most horribly terrifying look imaginable, saying more than the words ever could, ‘If you dare even come close to me, I’ll kill you... no, torture you until you want me to kill you.’ Harry swallowed hard, returning to his seat, hoping that maybe another day would be better.

But that better day never came. Harry was so overcome by dozens of Gryffindors, constantly begging him to give them house points for meaningless tasks such as “very white teeth”, or “especially red tongue,” in hopes of winning the House Cup again, so that they could be in charge of the Disguise Dance. Whenever Harry did get the chance to look at Malfoy, he just turned away and walked faster in the opposite direction... things were not going very well at all.

However, the last week of school went on and everyone was trying as hard as they could to squeeze out every last point to their house that they could get, so that they would be able to host the Disguise Dance. It was really sad, how prefects were constantly taking away points from other houses for just as stupid things as they were giving them away to their own house. The point fluxuation was incredible, and Harry was really beginning to wish he hadn’t turned his second Quidditch match into a duel; they had lost so many points for doing that.

But, what was really turning the tide away from Gryffindor’s favor were the new Slytherins from Durmstrang. In every class, at least one of them was the first to put their hand in the air to answer a question, especially in Potions and Defense Against The Dark Arts. Worst of all, they always got it right! They were really starting to show off how much Durmstrang pays attention to the Dark Arts, and it was putting Slytherin greatly ahead of the other houses.

Amidst all of that, though, preparation for final exams was going on. Harry was cramming in every available moment he had, wanting to try and do as well this year as he did on the O.W.L.s last year. Expecting it to be a very hard exam, Harry spent nights in the library with Hermione (along with many other students), and sneaking off to the wNet as well to get a little extra information. When it actually came time for the tests, though, Harry was fairly disappointed... they were quite easy!

The Transfiguration test was actually fun. To pass, all they had to do was successfully transform someone into the animal of their choice, and then hold it for at least ten minutes. While Harry was sure Ron didn’t especially enjoy being a turtle, he was just as sure that watching him crawl around the room slowly, trying to reach a small puddle in the corner was great fun.

If Harry hadn’t known better, he would have thought that the Care of Magical Creature’s and Herbology’s exam were the same one. For Herbology’s, they had to take care of a living clod of dirt for the entire class period, and whoever’s was above normal in how healthy it was at the

end passed. Then, for Care of Magical Creatures, Hagrid brought in some living clods of dirt, and they had to take care of them for the entire class as well. Since they had never learned about living dirt in Care of Magical Creatures, Hagrid assumed they knew nothing about them, and wanted them to draw on other knowledge of other animals to figure out how to deal with them. But, since everyone had them in Herbology, it was an incredibly easy test, and everybody passed with flying colors, much to Hagrid's dismay.

Charm's test was even better than Transfiguration's. For that one, everyone was sealed in a small room, with a holographic opponent. As long as you beat your opponent, you passed the test. It was simple enough for everyone to do, especially since most of the class was in the Dueling Club and knew good tactics, and that the opponent's were about as fast as a doorknob and had the same amount of brains.

After the exciting Charm's exam, History of Magic was a real downer. It was a boring old test: sit down and write in the answers. Even though it was long and boring, it was still no more difficult than the others, and Harry was overjoyed when the bell finally rang and class was over.

Defense Against the Dark Arts was a welcome change from History of Magic. Though not as much fun as Charm's or Transfiguration's exams, it was still okay. Professor Quirrell took them all up, one by one, and presented to them three choices of people. After giving a long description of each, he asked which one was most probably the best to stay away from. It was very hard, all three choices were incredibly similar, except for a few things here and there. Harry had to really think before giving his answer, which happened to be correct.

Potions was its usual self as Professor Snape gave them double kill: a written exam, and a hands-on test. Harry had to rush through the way-too-long packet just so he would have enough time to be able to start the hands-on part of the test. Luckily, he finished brewing his potion before the end of class, being beaten in speed by Hermione, and the new Slytherins... including Tci. Snape took this opportunity to give his house an extra ten points for each person, since they made their potions so fast and perfectly. Just because Snape was slightly nicer to Harry didn't mean that he still didn't favor his house.

Spell Invention was by far the hardest. Professor Dumbledore gave them each different spell's MMSC, and they had to simplify it to as few lines of code as they could. It was very strenuous, trying to take out what you could, but leave in enough so that it would work, and then going back and changing everything when you took out even a little bit. Harry was relieved when he passed his in and Dumbledore smiled, saying he did a fine job. He also asked Harry to come in a little closer, and he said to him that Hermione had told him that the Bracelet had been stolen, and about his and Ron's little fight. Dumbledore assured Harry that he believed the Ring would be in no safer place than on Harry's finger, and let him keep it, as long as no more fights took place. Harry thanked him profusely and left the class to go to his last exam: Divination.

"You told Dumbledore about mine and Ron's fight?" Harry asked Hermione as they left the class.

"Well... yeah," she said. "I thought that he probably knew about it already, and not telling him would only make him want to take it away from you more, since you weren't being honest. I'm sure he'd never want to see anything like that ever happen again."

"He's not the only one," said Harry and Ron at the same time.

"Well I have to go to my Arithmancy final," sighed Hermione when they came to a break in the hallway. "Wish me luck."

"Good luck then," said Harry.

"Aren't you going to wish us luck with our Divination exam?" asked Ron.

"Are you kidding?" grunted Hermione. "A banana could probably pass that test."

“A banana?” asked Ron and Harry together, walking to the Divination classroom. “Why a banana? Why not a monkey, or a cat? Something... normal?”

“That’s Hermione for you,” said Harry when they reached the Divination classroom. “Definitely not normal.”

“That’s for sure,” said Ron as he and Harry climbed the ladder up and into it.

“Welcome students!” announced Professor Trelawney, floating about the room in a ghost-like manner. “I am very pleased to see you all here, not skipping out on the last exam of the day. I’m sure that you all will be happy you are here, for the test will be one that I’m sure you shall enjoy.”

“Yeah... I’m sure I’ll enjoy it, if in order to pass it I have to leave and never come back,” said Ron quietly.

“One by one,” she continued, not hearing Ron, “I will beckon you back into my room, out of the ear and eye range of everyone else. There, you shall read your own fortune.”

“Read our own fortune?” squealed Lavender.

“How exciting!” squeaked Parvati.

“Indeed...” said Trelawney. “Now, since I want you all to have as much time as you need, we will begin. Harry Potter! You are first.”

“Me?” asked Harry, pointing to himself and standing up.

“I don’t see any other Harry Potters, unless you count that extremely fuzzy man over there in the corner planting some lovely flowers.”

“Hey, how ya doin’?” said the man. He was dressed in a red shirt with blue overalls that weren’t buttoned. He was indeed, very hairy, and he was planting flowers in a mound of dirt on the carpet. When did he arrive?

“Do you get it?” asked Professor Trelawney, looking as though she may explode. “He’s hairy... and he’s a potter.... Harry Potter!”

“Yeah yeah...” sighed Harry amongst some scattered polite laughter. “Can we get on with the test, professor?”

“Oh, most certainly yes,” she said, opening up the curtain to her back room. “This way!”

Harry took one last look at Ron who gave him a double thumbs up as he walked through the curtain, and Professor Trelawney let it fall back down, cutting off the small, dark room they were now currently in from the other. There was a single, small, square table in the room with two chairs at opposite ends. Harry assumed that was where he had to go, so he sat down in the closest chair.

“Good afternoon, Harry,” she said, sitting down in the other. “I have most been looking forward to giving you your exam.”

“Why is that?”

“Don’t you remember?” she asked. “Last year, my Advanced O.W.L. test? You were the only one who passed it, and you did it with well over one thousand percent! You were amazing, a true Seer.”

“Yeah... I remember,” said Harry, slouching down in his chair and remembering how he had been able to predict the entire movie last year, only because he and Dudley had watched it so often.

“Now, I’d love to see your predicting ability in some more action,” she said, sounding very excited and pulling out a deck of cards from her pocket. “So I want you to predict your future with these Wizard Duel cards.”

“Alright,” said Harry, taking the deck from her and hoping that he would remember how to do this properly. He didn’t want her to investigate what happened at last year’s test by a failure

this time. But, since they had gone over how to do it correctly so many times in class, it wasn't as hard as Harry thought it would.

"First," said Harry, speaking out loud as he dealt the cards, "I'll deal out the who, what, when, and where cards face-down." Harry took the top four cards, and placed them upside down on the table next to each other, so that what they were was not visible. "Then, I place out the why and how cards, taken from the bottom of the deck." Harry quickly grabbed the bottom two cards, and slapped them down next to the other four.

"And now?"

"And now I flip over the who card," said Harry, curious to know what his fortune was going to be. Even though he knew it was going to be wrong, it could be fun anyways. He just hoped he remembered the hundreds of card interpretations that they learned. Running over in his mind everything he had learned in Divination during the year, Harry flipped over the first card and nearly fell over in shock.

"The who card is a... Harry Potter," he said, amazed.

"Oh my," said Professor Trelawney. "This really is a self prediction."

"Yeah..." wondered Harry. So far, this reading was going fairly well.

"Now what do you do?"

"Oh... yeah," he said, snapping back into reality. "Now, I flip over the what card."

"Get on with it," she said again, sounding very excited.

Harry turned it over, revealing the actual card. It was a werewolf. Now, what did a werewolf represent...? Oh yeah! That was one of the easy ones. A werewolf card meant change.

"The who card is me," said Harry, trying to recap everything, "and the what card is a werewolf, meaning change. So, am I going to change something?"

"You tell me," said Trelawney. "It's your final exam"

"Oh yeah," sighed Harry, remembering where he was. For a Divination exam, this was getting fairly exciting. His hand reached down to the when card and flipped it over quickly. It turned out to be a Disarming Spell.

"And what does a Disarming Spell symbolize?" she asked, trying to test Harry.

"Quickly or soon," said Harry. "Because it is usually one of the first spells used in battle, and one of the faster beams, though not as fast as the Korosucide curse which symbolizes something happening within the next few days, or even within the hour. So, since this is the when card, this event is not too far away from now, though not within the next week or so."

"Very good," she smiled. "And now the next one, the where card?"

Harry quickly flipped the card over, revealing a house elf.

"A house elf?" said Harry.

"A house elf...." said Trelawney.

"It symbolizes the world, or people as a whole," said Harry, digging back into his mind for the information she had given them. "Since most people believe in their enslavement, it represents all of humanity."

"So what have we got so far?"

"Well," said Harry, getting ready to summarize everything up again, "the who card is me, the what card is a werewolf, the when card is a Disarming Spell, and then where card is a house elf. So, I am going to change... the world, not too long from now."

"Now let's see just how and why you're going to do this," said professor Trelawney, looking very excited, more so than Harry had ever seen, except after the Advanced O.W.L. exam last year.

"Alright," said Harry, turning over the how card.

It was Dumbledore.

“Dumbledore....”

“Dumbledore?” said Harry, wondering how this prediction was working out. “He’s my how card? All of this is going to happen with Dumbledore’s help?”

“The why card!” exclaimed Professor Trelawney. “The why! Come now, flip it over! Let’s see why all of this is going to happen!”

“Okay,” said Harry, almost feeling a bit nervous. His arm was shaking slightly as his hand made way for the final upside down card. He flipped it over and almost collapsed out of his chair.

“You-Know-Who...” said Professor Trelawney, staring at the Voldemort card that Harry just flipped over.

“It’s Voldemort!” exclaimed Harry.

“Ah!” yelled Trelawney, covering her ears. “Don’t say the name!”

“Sorry,” said Harry, remembering that basically everyone except for himself, Ron, Hermione and Dumbledore was terrified of hearing Voldemort’s name.

“Well Harry? What does it all mean?”

“Okay,” he said, taking a deep breath before he gave the final summary of what was on the table. “I, taken from the Harry Potter card, am going to change, from the werewolf, the world, as symbolized by the house elf, not too far from now, which the Disarming Spell represented. All of this will happen because of Volde- er, You-Know-Who, and Dumbledore will help make it all happen. So with the help of Dumbledore, I am going to change the world because of Voldemort, and not too long from now.”

“Excellent job, Harry,” said Professor Trelawney, beaming. “You have passed this exam with flying colors.”

“Thank you professor,” said Harry, shuffling all of the cards on the table back into the deck and then standing up, his mind spinning.

“Oh, and one last thing,” she said as Harry was about to leave the room.

“Yes?”

“Do tell me if the prediction comes true. If it does, then I believe you may have the true aura and talent of a real Seer, and qualify for some Advanced Divination classes.”

“Of course, Professor Trelawney,” said Harry, grimacing at the thought of more Divination. “Though, if it does come true you should know since whatever it is will change the entire world.”

“We shall see...” she said, walking out with him to bring in the next student. “We shall certainly see. Oh, and by the way, you are free to leave now, Harry.”

“Thank you.”

“Ron Weasley!” she announced, stepping back into the main room with Harry. “It is now your turn.”

“How is it?” Ron as Harry as he walked up to the room Harry just exited from.

“Just like everything else in Divination,” said Harry, wanting to throw off the prediction he just made. “Make it up and you’ll be fine.”

“Oh good,” said Ron as he entered the small room with Trelawney. Harry wished him a quiet good luck and then left the room, wanting to get out of there as soon as possible. That was the last time he’d have to be in that room for an entire year! Nice... very nice. With those happy thought in mind, Harry slowly walked back to the common room, taking his time, the entire year behind him. All that was left to do was to go to the Disguise Dance... and that was definitely not work!

After the very long and slow walk, Harry opened the door to the room, and was surprised to see that there were actually quite a few people in there, running around and looking extremely worried. They were slamming into each other, yelling, ripping their hair out, and all red in the face.

“What is it?” Harry asked the closest one he could find. It was one of the new Gryffindors, Trenholm, a first year. Their exams didn’t take as long as Harry’s, so it’s no wonder a lot of the lower class students were there.

“It’s Slytherin!” he exclaimed, looking even angrier after mentioning the name. “They’re two hundred points ahead of us and there’s only a few minutes to go before the end of class and the decision of who is going to host the Disguise Dance will happen!”

“Hey Harry!” yelled another first year, walking over. “You’re a prefect, aren’t you?”

“Yeah...” sighed Harry, seeing where this was going.

“Hurry!” said Trenholm. “Give us two hundred points for something!”

“What!?” demanded Harry. “I can’t give you that many!”

“Why not?” asked the second one.

“The professors keep track of each house point addition and subtraction made. If I give or take away too much for no good reason, I can have my prefect title taken away from me!”

“Well, then give us five points forty times!” he said again, sounding desperate.

“Do something!” ordered yet another, walking over to Harry. “We’ve only got a few more minutes left until-”

“Attention students!” came Dumbledore’s voice out of every wall in the entire school. It was only the second time in Harry’s life that an announcement had ever been made like that. “I am happy to announce that the finals are now officially over, and the points for the houses stand as follows.”

“Oh no!” yelled everyone in the room except for Harry. “It’s too late!”

“In fourth place, with six hundred and five points, Ravenclaw. In third place with six hundred and ninety points, Gryffindor. In second place with seven hundred and forty five points, Hufflepuff. And, in first place, with eight hundred and ninety points, Slytherin. Congratulations Slytherin, you will be hosting the Disguise Dance tomorrow evening, and it shall be decorated in your colors. I am proud of you all for doing so well, and keep up the good work next year. Who knows when another Disguise Dance may pop up again. This is your headmaster, Dumbledore, over and out.”

“Oh man...” sighed Trenholm.

“I can’t believe we didn’t win!”

“The one year we actually had to win... we didn’t!”

“And third place... that’s the lowest ever!”

“Oh come on guys,” said Harry, trying to cheer them up, though he felt pretty low as well. “It’s not so bad. Think of it this way, now we don’t have to go through the trouble of setting up the dance.”

“Oh come on Harry...” sighed another one. “We may be younger than you, but we’re not stupid.”

It wasn’t too much longer before the rest of Gryffindor house came back from their exams, each wearing the same expression of gloom and depression. Everybody had expected to win no problem, just like the past five years. Losing was something they weren’t prepared for, especially losing to Slytherin. It got even worse as some Slytherins flaunted their victory,

grinning at members of the other houses as they made their way down to the Great Hall, to set up the Dance and make it however they wanted.

But, Harry got over it and tried to help everyone else in his dorm room too. Ak was quick to get over it as well, most of his friends were in Slytherin anyway, so with two people trying to help, Ron, Seamus and Dean were all in as high spirits as they would have been had Gryffindor won; especially when it came time to make the costumes. The five of them had great fun creating them all night long, and they came out looking very nice. It's not as if they would have been able to spend so much time on them had they won, and had to help decorate the room instead.

Ron's costume was very creepy looking. It was a black all over suit and pants with extra spider-like arms coming off the sides. He also created a mask that looked exactly like a spider's head. When he put everything on, Ron appeared to be another one of Aragog's offspring from the Forbidden Forest.

Harry's disguise was very nice, and much more complex. He created a centaur uniform, complete with working hind legs. It took all of the transfiguration and charms skills he had to create it, but it was worth it. As Harry walked around in it, Ron kept saying that he looked exactly like Firenze, a centaur from the Forbidden Forest that they had met in their first year.

Ak's costume was a little disappointing. For all that Harry thought Ak knew, he showed no sign of it in his design. He created a full body suit that was gray all over. Then, after he slipped that on, he just put a hockey mask on over his head and said he was finished. After a few good laughs, he said that he and some of his friends were going as the same costume, and when they stood together, it would appear as though they are all the same person, since the gray costumes would blend together. Harry just shrugged, and made his way downstairs with everyone else, to show off his disguise.

After a few hours of everyone gathering together in the common room, showing off their costumes, bragging about how easy they thought the exams were, and trying to cheer each other up, it was finally time for the actual dance to begin. All at once, everybody made their way down to the Great Hall, anxiously awaiting the time to enter and start the fun.

But, Harry didn't much mind waiting. It gave him time to look around and see students' from other houses costumes. There were dementors, banshees, fairies, unicorns, ogres, trolls, ghosts, regular masks, and even some dressed up as other wizards. Hermione was wearing a neat Dumbledore costume that she whipped up, and Harry wouldn't have been able to tell that it was her if she hadn't specifically told him back at the common room. Harry was wondering if he'd be able to find Cho out of everybody else, or if anyone would be able to find their dates for that matter. It was going to be an interesting night, that was for sure.

Just then, before Harry could give it another thought, the doors to the Great Hall swung open, revealing the inside. He, along with the rest of the school, ran into the room, eager to see how it was decorated.

At first, Harry thought he had stepped into the wrong room. The entire Great Hall was pitch black, just as dark as the hallway at the pyramid. The only source of light was that coming in from the entrance door, and that was slowly closing behind the massive group of students. When it was shut all the way, it was so dark, Harry couldn't see his hand if it was right in front of his eyes. What was going on?

Just then, in a blinding light of all the shades of green and silver colors, the Great Hall exploded into a massive, illuminated room. Dozens of silver and green colored, rotating spheres hung from the ceiling, spinning around and making the walls and floor of the room look like the Slytherin common room. Snake banners hung from every spot on the walls, and even the floor

was painted the house's colors. Despite the fact that it was a Slytherin-saturated room, it was still an awesome sight, and made only better by the extremely varied costumes that everyone was wearing, and the food that was set up at tables (that had green and silver with black snake tablecloths) all over.

A moment later, music began magically playing from every wall in the room and the dance officially began. Everyone started dancing in their own way to the beat, browsing what there was to eat, and talking with friends... or at least, who they thought were their friends. It was impossible to tell who was who!

"Hermione? Is that you?" Harry asked someone near him in a Dumbledore costume.

"Yeah, it's me," she responded. Then, Harry looked down and saw her cat, Crookshanks rubbing up against her leg, purring.

"Oh good," said Harry, a bit confused. "But, Hermione, why did you bring Crookshanks?"

"Well, he simply wouldn't stop giving me this terribly sad face until I told him that he could come along," she admitted with a small sigh. Then, turning to her cat and seeing the happy look on his face, she brightened up.

"Have you seen Ron anywhere?"

"Well, no. But, I do know he's dressed up as a spider."

"Ron? A spider?" she said, sounding as if she didn't believe him. "He'd better not look in a mirror or else he's going to scream."

"Have you seen Cho?"

"No... I haven't seen her yet," said Hermione, now scanning the room for a spider. "But, I see Ron. Good luck finding her, Harry."

"Thanks," he said as she walked past him, pushing her way through the intensely packed room. Harry turned his attention back to looking for Cho, staring at everyone around him, as if peering into their soul and seeing if it matched Cho's. Even though Harry didn't see her right away, he did see someone in an incredibly realistic house elf suit.

"Hey, nice costume you've got there," said Harry, eyeing the perfectly re-created skin, and the various, non-matching clothes all over. "But you've got it a little bit wrong... house elves don't wear clothes."

"But they are wearing clothes if their name is Dobby," it squeaked, taking Harry back in surprise. This wasn't a costume, it was a real elf!

"Dobby?" Harry asked. "Is that you?"

"Yes it is, sir."

"What are you doing here?"

"All of the elves are having tonight off," he squealed, not looking especially happy, though not sad either. It was quite a neutral attitude. "Some of them are still not wanting freedom, so Dumbledore is giving them one last chance to be able to change their minds."

"So then who is going to clean up and supply new food and drinks?"

"The professors," grinned Dobby slightly.

"Ah, I see," said Harry. It was just like last year at Christmas. All the house elves were given time off, and the professors took their place. The only difference was that this year, Snape was back in the faculty. Harry would give anything to see him in a chef's hat and apron.

"What did I tell you, Dobby? I said nothing bad would happen to me if I returned to Hogwarts, and once again, I was right."

"Oh Harry Potter..." he sighed, looking extremely sad. "If only I could say."

"What? Say what?"

“I is not saying!” he squeaked, sounding very serious. “Even though you is very important to us elves, masters is even more important, and I isn’t betraying my master by telling! No, no, no! Bad Dobby! Not even thinking about that!”

“Calm down, Dobby,” said Harry, trying to stop him before he tried to punish himself again. “You don’t have a master anymore, remember? You’re a free elf.”

“Oh Harry Potter...” he sighed again, his eyes filled with tears. “I is still having a master.”

“Who then? Who is your master?”

“Harry... is that you?” came a voice from behind. Harry turned around, and before him stood the most wondrous creature he had ever seen in his entire life. Before even looking at her face, or any other part of her body for that matter, Harry could tell it was Cho, just by the aura she was putting out.

Her costume was absolutely stunning. It was a perfectly white dress that seemed to flow like water as she swayed from side to side. Behind her were beautiful, feather wings that extended out just enough to make her look like an angel. She didn’t need the glowing halo above her head, or the small golden harp in her hand, or even the entire costume for that matter. Even without all that, she was even more wonderful than an angel.

“Y- yeah,” stuttered Harry, still enthralled by her beauty. “It’s... me.”

“Oh well good,” she smiled. “I wasn’t sure if you were the front or back end of the centaur. You did such a great job on your costume, it’s hard to tell that it’s you up front, and not one of the ones from the Forbidden Forest.”

“Oh, this?” said Harry, pointing to his disguise. “Bah, this little centaur thing is nothing compared to yours. Cho... you look absolutely stunning.”

“Why thank you,” she said, beaming, her blinding, invisible aura growing even brighter. “This is a very nice song they’re playing right now, want to join in and dance?”

“That would be perfect,” said Harry, grabbing Cho by the arms and joining the massive crowd, swinging and swaying quickly to the rhythm. This was easily one of the greatest nights of his life.

The Dance went on well into the night and then past midnight, but it didn’t matter to Harry. To him, time was standing still as he and Cho were together. It was wonderful being with her, and looking at the stupendous disguises that everyone was wearing. Harry had only seen the tip of the iceberg before. There were hundreds of other students in costume, and each was different. It was very interesting to see what kinds of costumes each person had chosen.

Harry saw that Ginny was dressed up as a broomstick and Malfoy was wearing a Snitch costume. The two of them were inseparable that night. Malfoy kept whispering into her ear, and Harry was dying to know what he was telling her. Was he asking her opinion on how to get some more revenge on Harry? Was he telling her where the Bracelet was? As he was moving around with Cho on the dance floor, Harry tried to steer in their direction, but every time they got closer, the two of them moved away just as fast, as if they were avoiding them... which they probably were. Harry just hoped Malfoy wasn’t trying to turn Ginny against him.

“I’ll be right back, Harry,” said Cho after they had sat down at one of the tables after an exceptionally fast-paced song. “I’m starving... you want me to get you something to eat too?”

“No thanks,” said Harry, feeling far too happy to eat. “Maybe later.”

Cho smiled and disappeared into the crowd, making her way to the opposite end of the room. Harry sighed deeply, and slouched down into his chair, looking at everyone else still keeping it up on the dance floor. How long was this party going to go on for?

“Finally,” said Malfoy, coming out of nowhere in the crowd right up in front of Harry. He was standing next to Ginny, who looked as though she was in tears. “Finally you’re alone Potter. Come on, it’s time to go!”

“What are you talking about?” spat Harry, standing up. “What have you done to Ginny.”

“There’s no time to explain,” he said, waving his arms. “I’m not going to leave you to die like you did with me; I’m better than that, I’m better than you. So, it’s time to leave! Now Potter!”

“I’m not going anywhere until you tell me why Ginny’s crying!” said Harry, sternly.

“Attention everyone!” said the Head Boy, Joe Bob, rising up slightly from the ground, just enough to be above the heads of everyone. He was dressed up as a king, with a crown, jewelry, a long, slowing cloak everything he needed to look superior to everyone else. “It’s now the time you’ve all been waiting for!”

“You idiot!” seethed Malfoy through clenched teeth. “Now it’s too late!”

“Everyone... take off your disguises, and see who you’ve been with!”

But, just then, all of the lights went out in the room, leaving it completely pitch black. There were a few screams of surprise, and Harry could feel people scurrying around, trying to figure out what happened as they bumped into each other. Then, a hand grabbed hold of Harry’s arm and began pulling him through the crowd, as if he were some sort of plow, and the students in the room were snow.

“Come on, Potter!” said Malfoy. Evidently, he was the one pulling him.

“Where are you taking me!?” demanded Harry.

“Some place safe,” said Ginny, sounding as if she was trying her hardest not to cry.

“What are you talking about?” asked Harry. “The lights just went out! It’s not anything that we have to run away from.”

“Just shut up, and go faster!” yelled Malfoy above the continuing screams from the people all around them. “We only have time to save one.”

“What do you mean?”

“He’d get suspicious if we tried to sneak everybody out, so we can only save ourselves, and one other,” said Ginny, now sounding even sadder. “You are that one other.”

“Okay, will you please explain to me what’s going on!?” screamed Harry, wanting clarification of what was happening. He ripped Malfoy’s hand off of his arm, and hoped he was still standing in front of him, though he couldn’t tell since it was so dark. “Who’s ‘he’? Why would you want to sneak everyone out.”

“Listen! There’s no time!” exclaimed Malfoy, sounding a little worried. “You’ll understand everything in just a few... oh no! It’s time!”

“Time? Time for what?” asked Harry. But, he didn’t have to wait long to find out. Once again, in a blinding flash, the lights in the room came back on, making everything visible once again, and a few sighs of relief were heard. Harry saw that Malfoy had pulled him quite a distance; they were now in front of the door that exited the room.

But, Harry’s attention quickly turned away from the door and up to the ceiling. There, above everyone’s heads were seven figures. The six new Slytherins, with Ak in the center of the five and Tci next to him, were hovering between two other figures on the side of their group. Those two were clad all in black, except for an extremely tiny slits in their masks for them to see through.

After everybody stopped screaming, and realized that the lights were back on, they all turned their heads up to the floating figures. The eight of them let out deep, almost terrifying laughs, laughs that made your blood turn to ice and put a stop on your brain. They reached their

hands up to their faces, and each of them ripped off their masks simultaneously, revealing who they were. But, they were not Hogwarts students.

They were Voldemort and his Death Eaters.

Chapter 29- The Terrifying Truth

At first, no one said anything. Though, what could you say when the master of evil reveals himself alongside his minions at your school dance? Everybody was frozen with shock. Even Harry, who had dealt with Voldemort multiple times before was speechless. This time, he wasn't a harmless dream. He was real now... and in Hogwarts.

Then, what should have been excited talk and giggling that the person you had been with all night really was or wasn't your best friend or date was replaced by horrible screams of unimaginable terror. Everyone in the room thought that they were going to die and there was only one way to escape: run; and that's just what they did. Everybody started running around and slamming into each other, in the end, getting nowhere.

“SILENCE!” thundered Voldemort, in his horrifying, deep, snake-like voice that echoed throughout the entire room. All the people that had been running now stopped in their tracks, breathing hard, sweating, crying, whimpering and shaking. This was the first time almost all of them had ever actually seen Voldemort. “As long as a certain person in this room cooperates with me tonight, most of you will leave here alive.”

Harry looked up at Voldemort and his followers to his side. He was in the middle, Wormtail was on his right, another Death Eater next to him, three others Harry had never seen before were on the left, at the far left end was Neville and at the far right end was Ernie. Each of them was wearing the same, almost satanic smile of victory. So, all this year, the new Slytherins were really Death Eaters, and Tci was also a Death Eater... for two years! But, worst of all, Ak had really been Voldemort... all year long! And Harry had been friends with him.... It was enough to make him sick to his stomach. Harry just wanted to throw up, and then wake up tomorrow with this having never happened.

But, what Harry noticed most about Voldemort now was that he was wearing a few accessories. Around his neck was the Sorcerer's Stone on a golden chain, and on his hand was the red Glove, the blue Watch... and the yellow Bracelet! So he did already have it! But, how did he have the Glove? Harry gave it to Dumbledore... his security must be terrible! Worse than Harry's! The only thing Voldemort didn't have was the Ring.

“Harry Potter!” he hissed, pointing a knife-like finger at Harry. “It is up to you whether the rest of the school lives or dies tonight.”

“How so?” asked Harry, trying to sound confident. All of the eyes in the school were on him, pleading to do whatever Voldemort wanted him to do. To make it worse, since his was the only voice in the entire hall, it made him sound very small, and all alone.

“All you have to do is give me the Ring,” he continued, floating down from his high position right to where Harry was, with the rest of his followers. As they made their way down,

the students parted to the side, not wanting to be the one to get in their way. He stopped right in front of Harry, barely even a foot away. He gave a sickening smile. “Then, if you do, perhaps only a few of them will die... and you’ll even get to choose which.”

“What do you think you’re doing here?” demanded Harry, trying to buy some time. “You know that Dumbledore will be here any second, and then you will be dead!”

“Ahh, my little adversary,” he said, still grinning, “Dumbledore is now down in the kitchens along with all the other professors. By the time he knows I am here, it will be too late. You see, for every dance this school has ever had for the past six years, the chaperones have always included Death Eaters. However, I have conveniently told them all to deny the invitation to chaperone this time, so that I may come. As for the other usual adults that come, they have been... disposed of.”

“What are you doing here?” demanded Harry again, shaking with hatred.

“Ah, that is a very interesting tale indeed. You see, Lord Voldemort always plans ahead... always. This plan began two years ago, it was originally another backup plan, just in case a different plan of mine failed. But, this one soon showed that it was superior over the other in simplicity, ease, and getting what I wanted. So, I killed the other plan and made this one my priority.”

“So then this was your backup plan,” said Harry, trying not to show his fear. “The one you were talking about last year... just around this same time.”

“Oh no!” laughed Voldemort, sounding like a bubbling lava pit. “My dear boy, you must not take me for a fool! An evil Lord, yes... but a fool, most certainly not! Ever since you were born I’ve had another plan ready to go, just in case my others fail. Even if this one does, which it most certainly will not, I will still get you.”

“So how did this plan begin two years ago?” asked Harry, trying his best to stall. “That’s what you said, didn’t you?”

“Yes it is,” he hissed, glaring at Harry, as if seeing through his little plan. “It began with my dear friend Sata Nick here to my right, or as you know him, Tci. He played a very important role in this wonderful plan. That night you tried to steal Dumbledore’s phoenix was the same night Sata had to sneak into the headmaster’s office and re-program the Hogwart’s Quill to include us five on the list for next year. Yes, you see, at first I thought my plan was in jeopardy when you saw Sata, but he was a resourceful man, and fed you a lie that you easily bought.”

“What’s the Hogwart’s Quill?” asked Harry, seeing an opportunity to stall even more.

“My lord!” exclaimed Voldemort, looking shocked. “Do they teach you nothing here nowadays? Back in my day, the Hogwart’s Quill was common knowledge to everyone! But, anyways, it is a magical quill of course. Every day, it sends out a signal around the entire world that only magical children are sensitive to. It reads that they exist and then records their name. Then, once they reach the age of eleven, if they are still on the list, a letter is sent to them, asking if they want to come to Hogwarts. So, unless me and my four associates’ names here were on that list, the plan would have failed long ago.”

“And what a shame that would have been,” mumbled Harry.

“Ah yes,” sighed Voldemort, “there have been many times that I thought this plan wasn’t going to work. I remember after the first Dueling Club meeting, how Sata sent me a report on what happened.”

“Why? What happened then?” asked Harry, trying to remember anything unusual that had happened during their first meeting last year.

“You mean you don’t remember?” questioned Dumbledore, raising his voice ever so slightly. “I would have thought that you would have remembered it very well, especially since it happened to you as well.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Remember Priori Incantatem?” he asked, grinning and leaning in closer. “The reason you escaped from me two years ago?”

Oh yeah, Harry remembered now. Priori Incantatem was a rare event that happened when two wizards dueled with their wands and the cores inside the wands were from the exact same animal. In Harry and Voldemort’s case, it had been Fawkes. Both of their wands had a feather from him, and when they dueled two years ago, Priori Incantatem occurred. A golden beam connected the two wands, and every spell Voldemort had ever cast came out in reverse order.

“Yeah, I remember that.”

“Well then, you should also remember that it happened during your first dueling club meeting.”

“What?” said Harry. “No way!”

“Oh yes...” he hissed. “In the duel between Tci and Aylar.”

Harry could have hit himself in the head with his foot. Of course! During their duel, the wand’s spells connected in midair and formed one long, golden beam. They flew up into the air, and then there was a massive explosion. Harry had been so distracted by the explosion that he never thought to question why it had happened.

“Ah yes, now you remember...” he mumbled, turning to the side.

“But...” stuttered Harry. “Why would that have jeopardized your plan? I mean, even if the two of them did share the same wand core, why would that have made me think you were involved?”

“Ah, so you do not know, then?” said Voldemort with a trace of pleasure in his voice. “You see, whenever a new Death Eater joins me, I cut off a bit of my flesh and add it to the core of their wand. Not only does it make them more powerful, but it also prevents them from fighting with each other. Whenever they try to, Priori Incantatem happens, and negates their attacks.”

“I still don’t get it... why would that have been a threat to your plan?”

“Oh for god’s sake!” exclaimed Voldemort, shaking his head. “Can’t you put two and two together? If you had known that little fact, then you would have found out that both Tci and Aylar are Death Eaters!”

“What?” stammered Harry. “Aylar is a... Death Eater?”

“Well of course!” he yelled, glaring at Harry, his eyes flaming. “What did you think? Someone that powerful has to be!”

“But... I thought he was Dumbledore’s son....” said Harry, looking around for any sign of Aylar. He saw him standing right behind Voldemort, wearing the same gray and hockey mask costume as the Slytherins were before they ripped them off. He walked up next to the other Death Eaters and removed his mask. Now, much more noticeable than it was when he wore his disguise was the giant grin he was bearing.

“Well, more or less he is,” said Voldemort. “Aylar was not born in the ‘traditional’ method; Dumbledore is too old. No, he was created using very advanced magic, stuff I am barely even able to perform, even at my advanced state. I combined my blood with Dumbledore’s and then implanted that into a forced volunteer female Death Eater. I can tell you, when he was born, Aylar already had the brain power of a first year, and now he knows more than most graduated students.”

“Dumbledore?” grunted Harry. “How did you get his blood? Did rob a blood bank or something? Or did you just get one of his old shaving blades?”

“I suppose you could say that...” he grinned. Harry was beginning to get worried now; the conversation was dying down. If he didn’t think of something quick, then they would have to fight.

“So... I see that you have all the Legendary Items,” said Harry, instantly realizing that it was a mistake to say a second after he said it.

“Why yes, thank you for reminding me,” he grinned. “I have all of them... except for one. I’ll be needing your Ring now.”

“Why didn’t you just take the Glove when we were in the pyramid?” asked Harry extremely quickly, desperate to stall. “I mean, you could have killed us all then and gotten the Glove. No one else would have known the difference.”

“Ah yes,” said Voldemort, stopping his movement closer towards Harry. “That is a very good question. You see, even though I could have gotten the Glove, it wasn’t my greatest priority at the time. The flooding of gas in the pyramid took me by surprise, completely ruined my plan for the pyramid. So, I had to play it safe and let you guys lead me out of there. If I had killed you then, I would have been trapped inside the Pyramid, doomed to die along with it. That’s why I needed to save you from the werewolf guardian by using the Homorphus Charm. It was one of the hardest things for me to ever do, save your friend’s life. But, if you had found out later I had the power to perform the charm and then didn’t, you would have questioned me, and that was something I couldn’t take the chance for.”

“After all, what’s the point of becoming immortal if you’re not alive to enjoy it?”

“Ah yes, and now it’s time to begin enjoying it!” exclaimed Voldemort, looking hungrily at Harry’s Ring. “Now, I’m going to make this as simple as possible, Harry. Either give me the Ring and a minimum amount of people will have to die tonight, or refuse and face the horrible consequences. What is your decision?”

Harry’s mind was racing? What should he do? Should he give Voldemort the Ring and pray for a miracle? No! Even now, the thought of parting with the Ring was overwhelming, giving Harry a burst of weakness and painful sadness all over just from the thought. But, if he took the risk of not giving it to him, someone was going to pay, and it probably wasn’t going to even be Harry. But, if he gave it to him, all would be lost. So no, no matter what the consequences were going to be, Harry couldn’t give him the Ring.

“No way!” yelled Harry. “I’m not going to give it to you!”

“I was hoping you’d say that,” smiled Voldemort, saliva dripping through his teeth. “It will make tonight so much more interesting.”

Still keeping his eyes on Harry, Voldemort reached his long arm into the crowd of students behind him and grabbed a random person. He wrapped his arm around the front of her neck, and brought her to his front. He pointed the tip of his wand to the top of her blonde-hair covered head, with his other hand and squeezed her neck tighter with his other, giving her no chance of escape. Her eyes all red and her cheeks wet from crying, she struggled against his powerful grip, though it was all in vain.

“You let her go...” said Harry through cringed teeth. Even though he didn’t know who this pretty girl was, the last thing he wanted was for her to die. She had her whole life ahead of her, it was not supposed to end tonight.

“Now Harry,” said Voldemort, pressing his wand up against her head even more powerfully. “It will be up to you whether little... oh, were are my manners? Excuse me, little girl? What’s your name?”

“P- Prancy,” she stuttered, the tears from her closed eyes flowing down into her mouth. Harry suddenly realized that this was Parvati and Padma’s little sister.

“Ah, Prancy,” said Voldemort. “Now, how old are you?”

“Twelve,” she said, bursting into tears again.

“Oh yes, what a fun age that is,” grinned Voldemort, now turning his head away from her and towards Harry. “So, Mr. Potter, do you want little twelve year old Prancy here to live to be thirteen?”

“Let her go,” seethed Harry, fuming with anger. “This is between me and you.”

“I’m going to ask you one more time,” said Voldemort, sounding annoyed. “Are you going to give me the Ring?”

Harry looked at the ground, trying to go over his choices in his head. He could risk an attack on him by grabbing the wand out of his pocket and then launching a surprise attack at Voldemort. But, then what? The worst Harry could do was knock out Voldemort, and then his Death Eaters would take over and kill everyone, not to mention get the Ring too. No, that was definitely not the best choice. Harry was stuck between a rock and a hard place and doomed no matter which choice he decided upon.

“Are you going to give it to me... Harry?” asked Voldemort in his nicest voice.

“No,” said Harry, keeping his head down, knowing he would not be able to bear the look in Prancy’s face if he saw it.

“Pity,” sighed Voldemort. There was a flash of green light, and a second later, Prancy’s body hit the ground, dead. There were shrieks and screams of horror and Harry looked at the ceiling, not wanting to gaze into Prancy’s lifeless eyes.

“Now why did you make me have to do that?” demanded Voldemort in his softest voice. “You do know I am going to get the Ring no matter what, so the same final destination is going to be reached, but now, because of your idiotic decision, Prancy will not be there when it comes.”

“You’re... inhuman.”

“How very correct you are,” said Voldemort, taking it as a compliment. “How do you think I could be in this such advanced state of being if I were still human.”

“Some call it advanced... others call it pathetic.”

“So, you think I am pathetic?” hissed Voldemort, looking very annoyed. “Well, let me show you just how pathetic I really am! PLUSIUS AVADA KEDAVRA!”

It was the most horrifying sight Harry had ever seen. Voldemort turned around, and shot out of his wand some sort of horrible, black spray that killed whoever it came in contact with. He blasted the entire front row of students, making dozens of students give off one final scream before their lifeless bodies hit the ground.

“STOP!” Harry screamed. “STOP NOW!”

“Excellent...” seethed Voldemort, stopping his slaughter and turning around to meet Harry face to face again. Behind him, Harry saw friends, family, boyfriends and girlfriends rush toward the recently killed. They bent over them, not knowing how to deal with what happened. Some cried into their bodies, others just hung their over them, pale with blank expressions, unable to comprehend what just happened.

“You’re not even inhuman...” hissed Harry, filled with so much rage, anger, and hatred that he was shaking all over, the hairs were standing up all over his body. “Being inhuman is something far too advanced for you.”

“Are you going to give me the Ring now?” asked Voldemort, crossing his arms and completely ignoring Harry and all the people behind him.

“Go to Hell you freak...” spat Harry.

“That is it!” yelled Voldemort, finally losing his very short temper. “I am tired of waiting for immortality!”

He ran towards Harry and picked him up by the arm. Tearing his way through the crowd, and stepping on top of the corpses, he stomped towards one of the food tables and slammed Harry down on the floor next to it with such force that all the bowls, cups and plates flew into the air and then crashed down on the floor next to him. Voldemort’s eyes practically giving off heat from the amount of fire glowing inside them, he slammed Harry’s hand with the Ring on it down on the table and held it there so hard that it began to go numb.

“Say goodbye to your Ring, as well as your hand!” yelled Voldemort, bringing his wand up over his head with the hand that wasn’t holding Harry’s arm down. “Excalibur!” The massive and scarily sharp sword erupted out of the tip of his wand, shining in the light from the room. He was going to cut Harry’s hand off!

Suddenly, just when Voldemort was about to bring the sword down on Harry’s hand, a deafening alarm went off, like a Muggle school’s fire alarm, only about twenty times louder. Voldemort dropped the sword and let go of Harry’s hand to cover his ears, and everyone else in the room did the same, including Harry. Where was that horrible alarm coming from?

Then Harry saw it: all the way at the other end of the room, where he had just been, right next to the exit door of the Great Hall was a small box that turned the school alarm on and off, and next to that was a very scared looking Joe. He had turned on the alarm!

“Siragus!” yelled Voldemort as loud as he could, which was not even hearable above the insanely loud alarm. Right where Joe was, there was an intense explosion, destroying the alarm and sending him flying into the air and landing face-first on the hard floor. He was either unconscious... or dead.

“That idiotic child!” screamed Voldemort, looking furious. “Now Dumbledore will be here any second!”

Voldemort could not have been more right. Not even a moment later, the doors to the Great Hall flew open and in flew Dumbledore, still in his slightly burnt cooking outfit. There were a few shrieks of happiness in the crowd, though not many, and Harry couldn’t help but crack a smile when he saw him soaring over the heads of everyone, landing right in front of Voldemort and Harry

“And just what do you think you’re doing?” demanded Dumbledore, looking at Voldemort with such power in his eyes and face that he looked fifty years younger. Harry had never seen him so furious, nor had he ever seen Voldemort look scared. Dumbledore ripped his wand out of his pocket and pointed it right at him, looking not very merciful.

“But- but master!” exclaimed Voldemort, dropping to his knees and putting his hands out to his sides. “I was just... I was just....”

“Silence!” yelled Dumbledore, fire practically come out of his mouth. “You have defied me for the last time! I simply cannot believe that you would betray me and try to get the Ring for yourself!”

Harry’s mind suddenly deflated. What was going on? What did Voldemort mean by ‘master’? What was Dumbledore talking about: Voldemort defying him? Wanting the Ring for himself? What was going on!?

“Excuse me... professor?” asked Harry, in a very confused voice. “W- what does Voldemort mean by... master?”

“Oh Harry...” sighed Dumbledore, putting his wand down and letting Voldemort tremble for a little while. “I am very sorry. Very, very sorry indeed.”

“Sorry? Sorry for what?”

“I am sorry for leading such a bright and talented young wizard like you down the wrong path.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Harry, beginning to feel a little worried.

“Oh Harry,” he sighed again, most of the ferocity gone from his face. He looked at Harry, with such a sad face, it almost hurt Harry to look at him. “Oh Harry... you see, it’s always been this way.”

“What has?”

“You see, Harry... I am Voldemort’s master.”

Chapter 30- The Truth Gets Worse

It was as if he had used the Cruciatus Curse on Harry’s very soul. Harry quickly felt his entire body freeze, go numb, and then start to twitch from the overwhelming amount of emotions that were running through him right now. Those words alone had more power than Voldemort’s Avada Kedavra curse, and were infinitely times more painful. How could it be possible...? It wasn’t! There was no way!

“Th- that’s impossible,” stuttered Harry after a few moments of nervous silence throughout the entire room. “Th- there’s n- no way that your h- his master... there’s just... no way that can be p- possible.”

“I can assure you that it is,” said Dumbledore, losing his sympathetic voice and turning into a much deeper, stern, and terrifying voice. “I have been his master ever since he began rising to power. But, no matter what has happened from that point on, I have always been greater than he.”

“Ha ha ha...” laughed Harry, trying to believe that this was just some sort of horrible joke. “You really got me this time Dumbledore.... Ha ha ha....”

“This is no joke.”

“B- but...” stuttered Harry again, still feeling as though he were in a state of complete shock. “You can’t be his master, there’s no way. You two are supposed to be sworn enemies, not part of the same team. He’s pure evil and you... you’re the complete opposite. You’re the greatest wizard in the world.”

“I know,” said Dumbledore, his tone now almost exactly like Voldemort’s, though without the distinct hiss. “It has been very tough, trying to lead a perfect life. By far the hardest thing I have ever done. Sometimes, I must even go out of my way, or take away a little from my cause just to show even more to the world that I am good.”

“But... why?” asked Harry, almost feeling as though he were going to burst into tears. Dumbledore, the man whom he had regarded almost as a father, a great man and a powerful wizard was really no more than a common thief or murderer. The only difference was that Dumbledore commanded Voldemort to do it for him, instead of actually doing it himself. It was too horrible to even think of.

“Oh, Harry...” he sighed, still in the new voice. “You are far too young to understand. I have experienced things that you are probably unable to even imagine. Things at both end of the spectrum: good, bad and everything in between.”

“And?” said Harry, finding himself unable to say anymore than that one word.

“Well, Harry, despite what you may be thinking right now, I am not evil. In fact, the real me is little different from the one you know.”

“I... doubt... that...” breathed Harry, still trying to overcome the serious blow his mind and spirit had taken. Just saying more than one word was almost exhausting.

“No, it’s really true. You see, the only difference between the Dumbledore before you now, and the one Hermione came to see just a few days ago is a single principle. The ends justify the means, Harry. They really do.”

“Oh yeah, and... that’s not... evil at all.”

“Not when the ends are so glorious and wonderful that bliss beyond a perfect utopia would inhabit the soul of every person on the planet!” he exclaimed, sounding quite serious, and almost a little angry. “Harry, like I said before, you still have so much left to see... you have not seen what I have yet.”

“And what... is it that... you see?”

“It is not what I see,” said Dumbledore, raising his pitch slightly. “It is what I have seen, and what you shall hopefully not see someday. Harry, years and years ago, before even Tom Riddle’s father or mother was born, back when I was a young lad, if you can believe that, I was given a chance. A chance to see the world as it would be in two possible scenarios: one of the future as it will be if things continue as they are, and another if someone intervenes. The first glimpse I got was of Earth, not too far from now. Muggles and wizards were at constant war with each other, and the casualties are overwhelming on either side, both refusing to surrender until the other has been annihilated.

“I looked even further into the future in that timeline, and I saw Earth... dead. The planet was literally dead. It was no more than yet another rock revolving around the Sun, lifeless, gray, and never to support life ever again.

“Then, I gazed into a different timeline. This one is based on if someone was to change the future for the better, and the difference was amazing. There were no more wizards and Muggles, there was only one race, with the benefits of each. Everybody lived in perfect and never ending happiness, living for the benefits of enjoying life, not for their own personal pleasures.

“In this timeline, I looked even further yet. The production was astounding. Every planet in the solar system was colonized and everywhere the people were spreading their peaceful messages to alien worlds, forever expanding their wonderful utopian empire, making the lives of everyone they came in contact with in the entire universe better.”

Dumbledore stopped for a moment and took a deep breath, as if trying his best not to cry. He looked overcome with anticipation for the future, but it all meant nothing to Harry. All that mattered was the Dumbledore was with Voldemort, and he was no better than any other Death Eater.

“Now, Harry, do you know how the second of these two timelines would be achieved?”

“No,” said Harry firmly.

“Well, neither did I,” said Dumbledore, pulling a chair out from the blank-faced and gaping-mouthed crowd. He spun it around and sat down on it, facing Harry. “So, I asked the person who allowed me to take this wonderful glance at the future, and do you know what he told me?”

“No,” said Harry again, his mind still trying to collect itself.

“Well, he told me that in the second timeline, an all powerful being made the people of Earth act that way, living in a society based on peace and love. Without his influence, there would have never been the second timeline, and the first, and far less appealing one, would have come true. Now, one last question Harry, do you know who the person told me the divine force was?”

“I can only guess....”

“It was me, Harry,” said Dumbledore, smiling and pointing to his chest. “It was me.... Imagine, being able to know that you are going to one day be responsible for changing the course

of life on Earth from ultimate annihilation to universal utopia? At first, understandably, I was a trifle overwhelmed. But, as the years went by, I became more aware of my mission in life and took it by the horns, wanting it to happen no matter what."

"So why didn't you just tell the people that?" asked Harry, trying to understand exactly what was going on here. "Why did you have to take the violent and terrifying path? Why make Voldemort your ally when you could have done it yourself?"

"Oh Harry... I tried to spread my message peacefully," sighed Dumbledore, "but it didn't work! People are stupid like that... they respond perfectly to acts of terror, but are deaf when it comes to messages of peace. Finally realizing that, I took up Voldemort as my ally when he was still a student at school, realizing his potential. He caused disasters, I cleaned them up, and my power grew to where I am today. Yes, had it never been for Voldemort, I would probably still be teaching Transfiguration now, though I may have left long ago, or even died. Who knows and who wants to? That's what I have to say."

"So your entire life," said Harry, the gears moving in his brain again, "you've done nothing but acts that would get you closer towards your goal of become all powerful."

"Well, more or less. As I said earlier, putting on a face for the public that my only goal is to keep Hogwarts peaceful, I have had to perform many acts that subtract some from my final goal, but firm the public's belief in me. As I can see by your and everyone else in this room's expressions, I did a very good job of hiding my true goal. However, sometimes, I do get lucky and a few of my intentions that were really to enhance my power are interpreted as acts of kindness."

"Such as?" asked Harry, trying to shake off some of his shock. Even though the one person he thought would always be on the side of good was now showing his true colors as Voldemort's master, he still had to try to think logically. If something bad was going to happen, he wanted to be ready.

"Oh, well the best one is my love of Muggle-borns," said Dumbledore. Harry tried not to look at his eyes as he talked, all the times he had looked into them before and seen hope, kindness and mercy... now all he would see was greed and terribleness. Harry couldn't bare the thought. Even though the horrible truth was now revealed, Harry still didn't want to believe it.

"How can that possibly help you gain power?"

"Oh my!" exclaimed Dumbledore. "They are one of the most necessary things in my path to immortality. haven't you noticed, Harry, that except for a few exceptions, Muggle-borns tend to be far more powerful than Pure-bloods?"

Harry ran over every Muggle-born he knew, and compared them to the Pure-bloods. Hermione, yeah, she was definitely above average. Then Ron... not the brightest bulb in the room. For the most part, he was right.

"You, Voldemort, and even myself are all Muggle-borns, Harry," said Dumbledore. Harry's ears perked up when he said that he was a Muggle-born. Harry had never really thought about it... what were Dumbledore's parents? You never really wonder about those things when it comes to older people. "You see, for a Muggle-born to have any magic at all, the magical blood inside the wizard parent must be above average, to be able to fill an entire child, even though they are only giving half. This ensures that the child will be even more powerful than either parent, and even more so when both parents are Muggles, and they have a wizard son or daughter. However, the power you are given at birth can only take you so far. That is where I come into their lives."

"What do you mean?"

“Oh come on, Harry!” exclaimed Dumbledore, throwing his hands into the air. “You are a Prefect, probably going to be Head Boy, Quidditch captain of an almost undefeated team, the school-renounced champion and official captain of the Dueling Club, not to mention fourteen O.W.L.s, two years ago’s Triwizard Tournament Champion, savior of the school from the Chamber of Secrets, and the boy who defeated Voldemort after getting through an intense series of tests during his first year, all to protect the Sorcerer’s Stone. You must have set a record there.”

“Yeah, so?”

“Use your brain, Potter!” he said, pointing to his head. “You don’t honestly believe that you could have accomplished all of that without a little... ‘help’ every now and then, do you?”

“What are you talking about?” spat Harry, now wondering if everything that had happened in his life up to now had just been a part of Dumbledore’s plan to make him more powerful so he would be an eventual ally.

“I am saying that while you are an exceptional boy by yourself, I have often given you a slight unfair advantage. Why do you think I gave you the Invisibility Cloak and told you how the Mirror of Erised works in your first year? Why do you think I went along with Lucius Malfoy’s plan to have me leave my position as headmaster in the second year? Why do you think I told Voldemort to make Barty Crouch Jr give you a little help every now and then during the Triwizard Tournament? What made me suggest to Professor Trelawney to use Monty Python and the Holy Grail? Who do you think suggested to Ernie to turn the Quidditch match into a duel? Who put a Dumbledore card in each of your packs? I did it all so you would have the opportunity to make yourself more powerful, to experience more and grow even greater with each and every challenge.”

“But what about Quidditch and the Dueling Club?” asked Harry, infuriated that his speculation was true. “What did you have to do with them?”

“Harry... come on! I know you think that your Quidditch team is good and all, but do you really think it stood a chance against other, better trained, more experienced teams? Do you really believe that your group of second years is as good as you saw them play by themselves?”

“Yes,” fumed Harry, not sure whether he felt more angry at Dumbledore, or disappointed in him.

“Well then maybe I was wrong for choosing to help you,” he said glaring at Harry. “But, anyways, I had Voldemort, disguised as Ak of course, control half of the second years, Chris and Joe, while I took the other half, Mike and Akshay. With us controlling them, they were unstoppable, and you were victorious in every match... except for that one against Hufflepuff. We had to remove our control from them then, or else you may have wondered how they could perform so poorly in the Dueling Club, but then be great during your small match against Ernie and his group.”

“So it was you who controlled the four second years during the Dueling Club matches!” exclaimed Harry, his brain back in its fully functioning form. “Somehow, you must have turned invisible and entered into the arenas. There, you took them over and tried to steal Hermione’s Bracelet... and you succeeded.”

“Very good,” said Dumbledore, grinning. “That’s why you lost the club meetings this year. I was so busy trying to control those second years, I didn’t have time to worry about helping you out. But, good thinking there Harry, maybe I was correct in picking you to help after all. Once you put your mind to it, you’re actually quite a bright boy.”

“But, there’s still one more thing amiss here,” said Harry, trying to find some sort of flaw in Dumbledore’s master plan. “How come during your little secret meetings with Quirrell, you

said ‘You-Know-Who’ has the Items if he was your ally? Wouldn’t you be happy that he had them, and not concerned?”

“How do you know about that?” demanded Dumbledore, standing up from the chair and staring wide-eyed at Harry. “How did you know about the meetings Quirrell and I had?”

“I listened in on them,” said Harry smugly, folding his arms. “All I had to do was transform into my Gryffin, and then the Animagus Invisibility Ring that you gave me would do the rest.”

“I knew it was a mistake to give that to you!” yelled Dumbledore. “But, I had to. What if Sirius came to visit, and he saw that you didn’t have it? He would begin to suspect me, and I couldn’t have that.”

“But why did you call Voldemort You-Know-Who?” asked Harry again.

“We weren’t calling Voldemort You-Know-Who!” yelled Dumbledore, looking more ferocious than Harry had ever seen him before. “We were calling you, Harry Potter, You-Know-Who!”

“What!?” yelled Harry, not understanding. “Why were you calling me that?”

“Just in case someone heard us,” he hissed. “Like I’ve been saying, I have taken absolutely no chances during my entire life to reveal my true goal. Even in private, I am still unable to talk about it directly. I am barely safe talking and planning in my head....”

“Well it’s a good thing, for you anyways, that you weren’t using real names,” said Harry. “If you had, I would have figured you out months ago.”

“Now do you see how hard my life has been?”

“Yes,” said Harry, but then, he wondered. “But, why didn’t you just do what you are doing now long ago? Why not proclaim to the world your true goal, kill me, and then make off with the Legendary Items and make yourself the ultimate being?”

“Oh,” laughed Dumbledore heartily, immediately snapping out of his anger. “Harry... there is a good reason why I did not kill you long, long ago. But, the answer is much to complicated and long for tonight. I’m afraid it will have to wait for another day.”

“Okay then,” said Harry, a little confused. “But, still, why didn’t you just tell the world your goal long ago and start it no mater what? You could have already began your ultra-Utopia by now if you had.”

“Because, Harry,” said Dumbledore in his most kind and soft voice, “I cannot.”

“Why is that?”

“Well there are two reasons. First of all, I am unable to get the Ingredients all by myself. You see, the spell that takes you down to the Hero’s Tests only works on youth, and as you can see I am not as young as I used to be. When I finally decided to seriously begin my quest, I was too old to do it on my own. So, I used you kids to do it for me; to go down and pass the relatively easy test, then deliver the treasure to me.”

“What’s the other reason?”

“Because I cannot begin my reign of bliss until you join me.”

“What makes that true now?” demanded Harry. “You have the three Ingredients, the Sorcerer’s Stone, and soon enough you’ll have my Ring. Take the Items and be off!”

“I’m afraid there’s more to the Immortal Potion than just that,” sighed Dumbledore.

“No there isn’t!” said Harry. “Hermione read to us how to make it in some sort of ancient book. All it said was that you needed the Items, the Stone and the Ring and then voila! You’re immortal.”

“Yes, that is true... but remember? When Hermione read out of the book she said that she couldn’t read the rest because it was smudged, remember that? I purposely smudged that part out,

in the off chance that someone may get a hold of the book. You see, I never do take any chances at all, do I?"

"What did the part you smudged say?"

"The most important part of the potion!" said Dumbledore, finally sitting back down. "Back when all three items used to be in Geb Pyramid, the guardian was one of the immortal gods: Anubis, the god of the underworld. Only he was able to brew the potion for the heroes that passed the test. If anyone else that was less powerful than him tried to concoct it, they would instantly turn into a pile of ash and never receive immortality. Even in my extremely powerful state of being now, I am still not as great as Anubis was."

"So how will me joining you give you more power?" asked Harry. "It's not like I can just surrender all of my magical energy to you."

"Ah... but that is where you are wrong!" exclaimed Dumbledore, looking rather excited. "You see, Harry Potter, there are not three Unforgivable Curses... oh no... there are four."

"Four? What is the fourth?"

"The fourth spell is one that is so terrible, that most dark wizards are even scared to use it. But, it is the only way a wizard of my energy can possibly raise his power any higher."

"What is the spell!?" demanded Harry again.

"The Soul Sucking Spell," hissed Dumbledore, grinning. "It removes the soul from any living organism, much in the way a dementor's kiss does. But, instead of destroying it, the spell instead brings it inside the body of the caster, where it is absorbed by him, adding to his power that of the victim's. Unfortunately, unless the victim's power is above or relatively close to yours, you actually lose energy, so much at a time that it is possible to die. So this is one spell that you must be very careful to use. You can't just go around using it on everyone. That is why I instituted my Violent Policies."

"Violent Policies?" asked Harry. "What are those?"

"Oh don't tell me you haven't noticed?" said Dumbledore, staring Harry in the eye. Now, there was no glimmer or shine in them, just the blank, white and black spheres that everyone else in the world had. "Extreme Quidditch? Blood-thirst increasing Soaring Skateboards? Letting you kids use any spells you wanted at last year's Charms O.W.L? Instituting Necromancy, Curses, and Time Travel as new classes next year? It's all a part of subliminally putting in the back of the minds of youth everywhere to go out and duel to get more powerful so that I can absorb them. Even though I figured absorbing you and Voldemort would probably be enough, it certainly wouldn't hurt to get in a few others here and there, now would it?"

"So that's what you're going to eventually do to Voldemort," said Harry through his clenched teeth. "Suck his soul out and make him permanently a part of you and it's what you would do to me if I joined you."

"It is the only way for me to achieve god-like powers," he shrugged.

"One last question..." said Harry, the amount of new information his mind had received tonight was enough to make it explode already, but there was one more thing still bugging him. "Why not just use the Sorcerers Stone to begin with? It makes you immortal, and you don't have to go through the whole hassle and ordeal that the Immortal Potion requires."

"Oh Harry, you are too much!" laughed Dumbledore, slapping his knee. "Even though the Sorcerer's Stone gives you immortality, it does not give you the increased power that the Immortal potion does. No, I need the potion... and that reminds me of why I came here. I still need your Ring, Harry."

Harry swallowed hard, knowing now that all questions and stalling had come to an end, and it was time to face whatever Dumbledore and Voldemort had in store for him. Dumbledore

stood up, and Voldemort walked over to him, arms folded and grinning. All of the Death Eaters pushed their way through the crowd, and made their way behind their two masters.

“Before I ask you for it, though,” said Dumbledore, actually looking quite impressive with his small army behind and to the side of him, “I actually have a question for you, Harry.”

“What is it?” he demanded, spitting on the ground, aiming for Dumbledore and missing.

“Why on Earth did you not come running to me saying that you knew there were Death Eaters in the school besides Neville?” he asked, shaking his head in amazement. “You knew Ernie was one, as well as many prefects, and I’m sure you had many other suspicions... why didn’t you tell me about them?”

“Because I thought about what you told me, that they still had hope,” said Harry, trying to sound more brave than he was feeling. “I thought that if I told you about the rest, they would be expelled and that would be that. But, if I let them stay, maybe they would see the light.... Evidently, I was wrong.”

Harry glared at Neville and Ernie whose grins took up most of their faces. It was sickening to see them standing next to each other like that, showing off their dark marks as if they were five year olds and they were cool temporary tattoos.

“Evidently...” said Voldemort, smiling at Harry.

“You be quiet!” exclaimed Dumbledore to him, putting his hand up in front of Voldemort’s face. “You know I wasn’t planning for tonight to be the night I tell all of this, but because of you stupidity, it has to be.”

“I am sorry master,” he said humbly, bowing his head.

“Not as sorry as you will be after I’m through with you,” hissed Dumbledore, putting his hand down. “Now, Harry, there is one last thing I want to tell you before I ask you to hand over the Ring.”

“What is it?” asked Harry, knowing his time was short to think of something. But, what could he do? He would have been incredibly lucky if he had beaten just Voldemort, but with Dumbledore too... and the Death Eaters? The odds were not looking good.

“You know, all this time there has been one other person who has known my true goal other than myself and Voldemort.”

“Who? The Death Eaters?”

“Them?” asked Dumbledore, almost smiling and pointing to the group of students and adults behind him. “Oh no! None of them know that I am their master’s master. Ever since they joined him, they have regarded me as their number one enemy... next to you of course. I’m sure that this is all new news to them tonight, though they are all more than willing to accept it, lest they lose their heads.”

“Then who?” asked Harry, knowing that his time left with his Ring was short. It was very sad indeed... like driving your child to college, knowing that the further you got, the less time you had with him or her. It was the same way for Harry... only he would never see or wear the Ring again for the rest of his life.

“You,” grinned Dumbledore, pointing a finger right at Harry.

“Me!?” exclaimed Harry. This was more than he could take! How could he have possibly known Dumbledore’s true goal? How did he know that he was really Voldemort’s master? How could he have known any of this!? “There’s no way!”

“I’m afraid that there is,” he said, still smiling. “You see, like I said before, I never take chances, Harry. Absolutely never! Even with all the precautions I’ve taken, there’s still the chance that someone may still find out. So, I did the only thing I could do to make absolutely sure no one I didn’t want to would ever find out.... I made you my secret-keeper.”

“You made me a secret-keeper!?” screamed Harry. Then, he stopped for a moment and realized that it was true! When he was in the wNet with Hermione, researching the Ring, what had the screen had told them of some of the other powers that the Ring had: It slightly amplifies the wearer’s magical power, and increases their stamina a little. It also changes the temperature of the surroundings if someone that has made the wearer a secret-keeper is near. The colder it gets, the more serious the secret! Harry suddenly realized that whenever Dumbledore had been near him, he had felt cold, though he had always blamed it on the temperature or wind, or just taking it for granted. How could he have been so stupid!? “But, then I would have known all of this! I could have stopped all this from happening!”

“Yes, you could of,” said Dumbledore, “had you been awake when I performed the spell on you... or capable of understanding what I was saying.”

“What do you mean?” demanded Harry. “When did you do it?”

“I did it approximately ten seconds after Voldemort was defeated by you after he killed your parents on that famous night. I ran inside and heard you crying, wondering what had happened. Surely if Voldemort had attacked, you must be dead! But, I peered into your crib and saw you there, bawling your eyes out before you fell asleep moments later from exhaustion. Then, I realized that you were the solution to all of my problems! If you grew up with the secret in your mind, you would pay it no heed when you got older, having had it all your life. Knowing this, I immediately performed the spell and then ran away, feeling quite happy with myself.”

“What are you talking about?” demanded Harry. “Sirius said he was the first person to visit the house after my parents were killed! How could you have been there before him?”

“Because I was there the whole time,” grinned Dumbledore. “Who do you think was the one that told Voldemort to attack you and your family in the first place? It was me Harry... I told him to do it.”

Harry’s mind suddenly went blank. Everything that Dumbledore had just told him in the past hour or so no longer mattered. All the other families’ and people’s deaths he was responsible for didn’t matter. Now it was personal... it was his fault that he had no parents! It was his fault that he a scar! It was his fault for... everything!

“YOU MONSTER!” yelled Harry, putting all of his anger, sorrow and hatred into those two words. He grabbed for his wand, but Dumbledore was faster. He mumbled a spell, and Harry’s arm froze in place. He was no longer in control of the arm; it was forced back into a neutral position by his side, away from his wand.

“Now... that’s better,” said Dumbledore, Harry now glaring at him, seeing him for the monster that he really was... no, monster was too kind a word for this creature. He was just some sort of horribly twisted organism that somehow arrived on this planet happening to look like a human. “It is time for me to ask you, Harry.... You can either join me and become part of me and experience power, love and peace like you have never before, or I can kill you and I will become immortal by using somebody else.”

“Go to Hell you piece of trash,” spat Harry, this time hitting Dumbledore.

“Very well then!” exclaimed Dumbledore, fire suddenly roaring in his dead eyes. “I will become a god without you! Let me show you the power that I have already!” He raised his hand up into the sky, and snapped his fingers, making the sound echo throughout the entire room like a bell.

Suddenly, not even a moment after the snapping sound stopped echoing, everybody in the room, all the students and Death Eaters turned their heads toward Harry. Their eyes rolled back in their head as if they were being controlled by somebody else, and then they removed their

wands from their pockets. Harry swallowed hard, seeing over a thousand wands aimed directly at him.

Chapter 31- Harry Potter Against The World

“How did you do that?” gasped Harry, staring in awe at Dumbledore’s instant army of hundreds of people. They were little more than living zombies, staring at Harry with their blank eyes, ready to strike at a second’s notice in response to their master’s whim. “You can’t possibly be controlling all of them at once like that.”

“Well, you are partly correct, Harry,” grinned Dumbledore. “It is not I that is controlling them... nor is it Voldemort, or any of the Death Eaters before you.”

“Then who is?”

“You have played the Wizard Duel card game, haven’t you, Harry?”

“Yeah, so? What does that have to do with anything?”

“That game is yet another one of my secret plans to gain more power,” he smiled. “In each and every card, there is a small, undetectable spell. It is so small that just by playing the game a few times, it does not work. You must play the game several times for it to take full effect.”

“What does the spell do?” demanded Harry.

“Isn’t it obvious? It lets the creator of the cards control whoever was playing with them, as long as they were sure to put the weakened spell into the card.” He grinned, showing off his superior thinking. “So, every time you play a game, you are becoming more and more under control. That is why I had Ak institute the club and try to get everybody to join, and had Aylar make cards for the Death Eaters to use, they would still be able to play and not get noticed, but not be affected by the spell. Now, since the entire school likes the game, the entire school is under my power.”

“So then why am I not one of your puppets?” asked Harry, suddenly realizing that he should be part of the controlled collective and not able to think on his own. “Why am I able to control myself while everyone else can’t?”

“Well, there are two reasons why,” he grunted, sounding disappointed that he wasn’t controlling Harry right now. “First, you used the older cards with Ron, ones that didn’t have the spell put into them. They were safe to play with. Also, there is a drawback to using the spell that I did. If you play the game a lot, like you and Weasley did, then you build up an immunity to it, making me unable to control you. That’s why I had Ak cancel the Wizard Duel game meetings after the cancellation of the field trip. If he continued to have them every week, then the entire student body would build up an immunity to my spell, making all of my efforts useless.”

“So then why is Ron still one of your slaves?” asked Harry, assuming that he was. But, just then, his best friend burst through the crowd and appeared next to Voldemort and the other Death Eaters. He was looking almost rabid. His costume was torn up and his eyes were bloodshot, the veins were popping out all over his body. A mixture of foam and saliva was dripping through his clenched teeth that were looking especially sharp.

“Ron!” exclaimed Harry. “You weren’t affected by the card game! You’re okay... kind of!”

“I didn’t take my werewolf potion tonight! I was supposed to right after the dance,” he seethed, not paying any attention to Harry except for looking at him with a hungry expression. “And it’s a full moon! Watch out before I... AAARRRGGG!”

Suddenly, Ron grew three times his size and exploded his costume off, shooting shreds of it all over the room. Gray and black fur instantly grew all over his body, covering every surface and his arms, legs, stomach, everything gained at least fifty times their original muscle amount. Knife-like claws shot out of his feet and hands, and his head turned into that of a wolf's, the long snout, sharp ears, and teeth that looked like blades. He threw his arms and head up into the air, giving an unearthly growl that echoed throughout the entire school, making the blood of everyone that heard it curdle.

“GET HIM!” screamed Dumbledore at the top of his lungs. Not wasting a moment, everyone in the room leapt at the transformed Ron, shooting various spells at him in vain. Each time one of them came near him, Ron merely whacked them with his fist, sending them flying across the room and into the wall. But, there were so many of them that he was being almost overwhelming by them as they clung to his arms, head, body, everything. It was as if Ron was swimming in a sea of people, but more along the lines of drowning.

“What are you fools waiting for!?” demanded Dumbledore, asking the Death Eaters and Voldemort that were just standing back, watching the rest of the students in the room attacking Ron. “Get Harry! Get him now!”

“Yes master!” they all yelled, leaping towards Harry. Ernie, Neville and Aylar were the first three to do so, and Harry reacted instantly, taking out his wand.

“Just pretend it’s a Dueling Club match...” Harry thought to himself, wondering how he was going to beat three of the best fighters in the school. “Like one from last year, when it was a one on three match... it’s just a duel, just another easy match.”

“Any last words, Harry?” asked Neville in the middle of the three, closing in on him with his wand out, same as the other two.

“Yeah,” said Harry, feeling more enraged now than he ever had before in his life. “Siragus!”

The spell took them by surprise and delayed their reaction time. Before any of the three of them realized what was going to happen, the explosion already took place, sending them flying up into the air.

“Stupefy!” yelled Harry, aiming for Neville as he fell from his spot in the air. The red flash hit him, but did nothing. Neville, along with Aylar and Ernie, landed on his feet on the ground, like a cat would.

“Don’t you think that I am more powerful than that?” demanded Neville, staring at Harry with an amazed expression. “The Stupefication Spell has no effect on me anymore, I am more powerful than it can possibly be. It is the same for all of us.”

“Then why don’t you just Avada Kedavra me and get it over with?” asked Harry, wondering how on Earth he was going to defeat three almost invincible opponents. “Just one shot and game over, you win.”

“You don’t know how much we would like to do that,” said Ernie, glaring at Harry.

“But, we still have to follow orders,” added Aylar.

“Yeah, and the orders are to not kill you no matter what,” finished up Neville.

Harry sighed to himself and considered his options. No spells less powerful than the Stupefying Spell would work, and that took away a great many options, most of them. Amongst the only spells that Harry knew that were more powerful than it were the Unforgivable Curses... but he couldn’t use those on them! Even if they were pure evil, he still didn’t want them dead.

But, did he? Harry thought. The three people before him were followers of someone who killed his parents. Not only did that mean they approved of what he did, but they glorified it,

probably even laughed about it in private meetings! Nobody's lives meant anything to them, so why should their own!? It was time to teach them all a lesson none of them would ever forget!

"AVADA KEDAVRA!" yelled Harry as loud and with as much power as he could. Amazed that he was able to cast the spell, the infamous green light flashed, and not even a moment later, Neville collapsed onto the floor, dead.

"You... killed him," said Aylar in a flat yet amazed voice, looking down at his fallen comrade. "You really did do it...."

"Yeah!" exclaimed Harry, the exhilaration of battle flowing through him along with his blood and adrenaline. "And you're next! CRUCIO!" This time, there was a black flash of light, and Aylar's body exploded into no more than a home for pain.

"AAAHHH!" he screamed, having probably never experienced the curse before. Being a Death Eater from birth, he was probably never given the initiation. Harry knew what he was going through, though, unlike himself, Aylar deserved it.

Leaving Aylar collapsed on the ground, still screaming, the spell still going through him, Harry shot a look at Ernie, the final of the three left. He piped a little scream and jumped back.

"Woah woah woah..." he said, putting out his arms. "How about we just talk about this, okay Harry?"

"Time for talking is over!" Harry yelled, stomping up to Ernie and stepping on Aylar as he got closer to him. He pointed his wand directly at his head.

"Here!" exclaimed Ernie, looking terrified. He dropped his wand on the floor. "I'll set my wand down on the ground as a sign of my good faith. Listen, if we team up, we can take out Voldemort... together!"

"Bad move," whispered Harry. Ernie's eyes grew wide, realizing what was about to happen to him. "KOROSUCIDE!"

Ernie's body instantly exploded into millions of tiny pieces, the biggest being no larger than the tip of a pencil. They all fell to the floor, creating a small pile. A second later. Harry heard Aylar finally stop fidgeting. He was dead now as well, his brain unable to take anymore pain.

All three Death Eaters were now gone. Harry had done it... he really had! He had beaten three superior Death Eaters! Like it was nothing! No wonder Dumbledore wanted him as an ally. All it took was a little death spell and-

Suddenly, Harry stopped and realized what he had just done. He had just killed three people.... Sure, they were not innocent by any means, and the crimes they had performed were probably worthy of death, but it wasn't his place to decide. Harry had acted no better than Voldemort or Dumbledore himself. He had acted out on some primitive instinct of revenge, and three human lives was the price. Harry fell down to his knees. What had he done... what had he done?

"Hey!" yelled the Death Eater Sata, or as Harry had known him for the past two years: Tci. "Hey! Wormtail! Khan! Lestrange! Nott! Get over here! Potter's beaten the three new Death Eaters!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Wormtail, running over with the other three who stood before Harry looking dumbfounded. "Those three were the top of the still-student-Death Eaters!"

"Evidently," hissed Lestrange, "Potter is more powerful than we previously imagined him to be."

"Well he doesn't appear to be very powerful right now," commented Nott. "The way he's sitting there on his knees... almost pathetic."

“Harry!” yelled Wormtail, walking up and bending over so that the two of them were face to face. “Why aren’t you fighting!? What’s going on!?”

“I killed them...” whispered Harry very softly, not blinking. “I killed them....”

“I believe the boy is in shock from defeating his opponents,” hissed Khan.

“Well,” said Wormtail, standing back up, “our master said to bring him to him alive, so let’s just get him over there now.”

The four of them surrounded Harry and hit him with a Levitation Spell, hovering him over to Voldemort who was busy observing the continuing fight between Ron and the students under the spell of the cards. Ron appeared to be winning, around the sea of students that were still climbing all over him and attacking him was another ring of unconscious kids, either slashed up and bloody, or just from impact against the wall, ceiling or floor. Harry wasn’t sure which pile was bigger, though Ron was looking a little tired. He was thankful, however, that Ron was here. It would have been impossible to defeat all of those students on his own.

“Master,” said Wormtail, making Voldemort turn around. Harry saw that he was no longer wearing the Items. The Stone necklace, Glove, Watch, and Bracelet were all gone. Evidently, Dumbledore had taken them all back. “Potter has defeated the three most powerful still-student-Death Eaters.”

“Has he?” asked Voldemort lazily, looking only minimally impressed. But, what Harry noticed more than his expression was Crookshanks. He was still here! The ginger cat was walking around behind Voldemort, pacing, as if waiting for something.

“Yes, and what should we do?” asked Lestrange.

“Oh... I don’t know,” sighed Voldemort, waving an arm. “Don’t kill him but... hurt him a little I suppose.” Crookshanks suddenly stopped pacing and turned its head towards Voldemort, now slowly walking towards him.

At the prospect of a new fight coming on, Harry snapped out of his catatonic phase and back into reality. He had killed the three young Death Eaters, but life had to go on. If Harry didn’t defend himself, then he was going to end up just like they did.

“With pleasure...” seethed Wormtail as he gave a sinister smile. All five Death Eaters removed their Levitation Charms from him and let Harry fall to the hard ground. All of them except Wormtail put their wands away, and he aimed it right at Harry’s chest. “Now... which spell should I use first?”

Just then, when Harry was expecting some sort of horrible pain to enrapture his entire body, driving him nearly to insanity, Crookshanks leapt through the air and right onto Wormtail’s head, pinning him to the ground.

“What the!?” yelled Khan, taking out his wand and aiming it at Crookshanks. Just as he was about to shoot a spell out, Crookshanks flipped Wormtail over so that he laid on top of the cat, and not the other way around. He was using Wormtail as a human shield!

“Avada Kedavra!” yelled Khan, before he realized that Crookshanks had turned the tables on him. A moment later, he realized his mistake, but it was too late. The Killing Curse hit Wormtail, slaying him instantly. What was Crookshanks doing? He was acting like no cat Harry had ever seen!

Then, Harry realized that Crookshanks wasn’t a cat. From underneath the dead Wormtail, Arabella Figg appeared, replacing the ginger creature. She had been Crookshanks all along! Not wasting any time, Arabella aimed her wand at Lestrange.

“Inconscientus!” she yelled. There was a yellow flash, and he fell over on the ground, not quite dead, he was still breathing, but definitely unconscious. Having the element of surprise on her side, she quickly performed it on Nott as well before he had a chance to react.

“Avada Kedavra!” yelled Harry, aiming for the last one, Khan, seeing that he was about to attack Mrs. Figg. His body, along with his wand, fell to the floor with a squishy crash. Both never to be used again.

“What are you doing here!?” demanded Harry, jumping to his feet. “How long have you been Crookshanks!? Why were you Crookshanks!? What’s going on!?”

“Hold on! Hold on!” she exclaimed. “I’ve been the cat that you call Crookshanks for the past three years, Harry. I was originally assigned to protect you when Sirius was reported escaped from Azkaban and it wasn’t known that he was actually innocent. And, even though you no longer need protection from him, I thought it would be a good idea for me to stay... just in case. I think it’s a good thing I did. If I hadn’t shown up just now, who knows what would’ve happened to you just then.”

“So that’s why Crookshanks was never there during the day last year,” said Harry, feeling extremely weak and tired from performing so many difficult spells. Even saying that last sentence was draining. “You were busy teaching during the day and couldn’t be both professor and cat at once. That’s also why you attacked Scabbers too! Sirius must have told you the true story, and you wanted him dead just as much as he did.”

“Precisely,” she beamed.

“Well well well...” applauded Voldemort sarcastically. Both of them suddenly remembered that he was still there. “Aren’t you the bright one, Harry? And to think... I wanted to kill you? Why do that when I could have your superior brain?”

“Expelliarmus!” yelled Mrs. Figg, not wasting any time.

“Avada Kedavra!” yelled Voldemort back in response, just as fast.

As expected, the two spells met in midair. Arabella’s red beam, and Voldemort’s green one melded together into one, muddy colored ray that joined the two wands together. Both of them were putting all of their energy into trying to make their spell overtake the other, though neither was looking to be winning. Their power appeared to be almost equal, and Harry was sure that if Mrs. Figg kept it up for a little longer, she could win!

“Arabella!” said Voldemort in a hissing voice, his arm shaking slightly from the effort he was putting into concentrating on his spell. “When will you ever learn that the student has finally become superior to the master and that I will beat you?”

Mrs. Figg didn’t say anything. She just concentrated every last ounce of energy that she had on keeping her spell in the game, and it seemed as though she needed to be doing that. Her hand that was holding onto the wand was shaking far more than Voldemort’s, and now Harry saw that maybe her chances of winning weren’t as great as he had originally thought. The connecting beam suddenly began to grow more and more green from its darker state. The red part of it was dimming, until it became a light green all over, showing that Voldemort’s Killing Curse was winning. A brighter and brighter green is glowed, until it was now only one spell, the Avada Kedavra curse.

Voldemort had won the duel.

The green light flashed around Mrs. Figg, and giving one last scream, she collapsed to the ground, dead; another one of Voldemort’s victims.

“NO!” yelled Harry, seeing one of the greatest teachers, protectors, and friends he had ever had fall down to the floor with a loud thud. Her wand rolled out of her limp fingers, across the floor, and right up to the tips of Harry’s feet.

“Well well...” hissed Voldemort, putting his wand down. “It appears as though I was correct, as usual. She was foolish to think that she could stand against me and win. So many foolish people, Harry, so little time.”

“Shut up,” fumed Harry, not knowing what else to say. What else could he say?

“Ooh, talking big now are we?” grinned Voldemort. “Maybe I should put a little stop to your chatter once and for all.”

“Go ahead,” seethed Harry, shaking with rage. “Why don’t you stupefy or disarm me? I know that Dumbledore doesn’t want you to kill me, but there’s nothing to stop you from rendering me unconscious. Go ahead, do it!”

“Very well then, Harry,” he smiled, showing all of his perfectly white, fanged teeth. “But just remember this... you brought it upon yourself for me to fight you! Stupefy!”

The red beam exploded froth from Voldemort’s wand, right at Harry’s face. Instinctively, Harry shut his eyes awaiting the coming impact of the spell, then the world to turn black around him, and fall backwards on the floor with a thud. But... no such experience came. The world around Harry only stayed black because his eyes were still shut, and he immediately opened them up, wondering what was going on.

Before him laid Voldemort, collapsed on the ground. Harry quickly scanned the room, for any sign of who could have attacked him, but saw no one. The only explanation was that the Stupefy Spell had somehow, remarkably, bounced off of Harry, and back to Voldemort, hitting him with his own spell and knocking him out. But...how on Earth could that be possible?

Instantly, the answer came to Harry.

Colin Creevey.

Last year, that small boy had sacrificed his life for Harry, jumping in the way of Voldemort’s Killing Curse just before it had hit Harry. Instead of him dying, Colin had, and with his spirit departing the Earth, the same protection his mother had given him when she sacrificed herself had been given to him again. Colin’s love for Harry was far more powerful than any of Voldemort’s curses, and now Harry was going to show him once and for all!

Feeling a great surge of power flowing through him, Harry marched up to the fallen Voldemort. His bony body was still breathing, still alive, but only just. Even his Stupefy Spell was more powerful than many wizard’s greater spells, due to his insanely high magical energy level.

Remembering all of the deaths that the beast before him had been responsible for, Harry took out his wand ready to end his terrible life. Voldemort had killed countless innocent people, torn families apart, destroyed Harry’s life, and then sealed the bill by killing Prancy, Arabella, and dozens of other students tonight. Now, he was going to pay for everything he had done! He was going to pay! He wasn’t a human like Neville, Ernie, and Aylar used to be... he was a monster... undeserving of life. Killing him would be no worse than swatting a mosquito.

“AVADA KEDA-” screamed Harry, louder than he ever had in his life. But, just as the final syllable was about to escape his mouth, Voldemort disappeared into thin air. He erupted into a living flame and turned into a pile of ash, disappearing in the same way that all of his Death Eaters did. “Come back here! Get back here you coward and fight! Get what you deserve and have had coming to you all your life! Get back here and fight Voldemort! Get back here now!”

“I have a better idea,” whispered Dumbledore from behind. Harry spun around, and saw the old man behind him, his arms behind his back, walking closer. “How about I let Voldemort go away for now, and you fight me instead?”

“Me... fight you...?” swallowed Harry, not really sure what to think. Even though the two of them were on opposite sides now, and Harry should be able to fight him, he didn’t know if he could.

“Yes, I know that the chances of you winning are... zero, so I will, for the last time may I add, ask you for the Ring. Give it to me now, and I shall spare you a humiliating defeat, along with your death.”

“I thought you said you didn’t want to kill me,” said Harry, wondering what he could do. He looked all over the room for anything that may help him. The pile of unconscious students was growing, and with every new student thrown onto it, Ron’s energy was going down. Even though there were only about twenty kids still attacking Ron, he looked as though he was still having a tough time. His slashing movements were long and dreary, and when he did hit them, it was as if they were being rammed with a Nerf ball. Ron would be of no help to him now, and there was no one and nothing else in the room that could help him. All that Harry had was himself... that’s all he had to face the most powerful wizard in the world with.

“I am going to ask you for the final time,” said Dumbledore sternly, ignoring Harry’s question and extending his arm out. “Give me the Ring or face the consequences.”

“The only way you’re going to get the Ring is to cut it off of my cold, dead finger,” spat Harry, wanting to at least sound tough before he died.

“If that is what you want,” said Dumbledore, taking a deep breath, standing up straight, and taking out his wand. “So be it!”

“Wait a minute!” yelled Harry, suddenly realizing something. “You can’t hurt me! I have Colin’s protection! Since you were the one who told Voldemort to come and try to kill me last year, not only is Voldemort unable to hurt me, but you too! I have protection from you both!”

Remembering from his first year at school that Harry’s shield of love that Colin gave him also had offensive powers if he touched someone that he had protection against, Harry ran full throttle at Dumbledore and pressed his hands against his face, expecting it to boil and turn to ash, just like the old Professor Quirrell did when Harry touched him.

“What do you think you’re doing!?” asked a very confused Dumbledore. He used his wand to blast Harry off of his face and several feet across the room.

“But, that should have killed you!” exclaimed Harry, wondering what went wrong. Dumbledore showed no signs of being hurt, in fact, he looked just as healthy as ever... only much more annoyed. “I don’t understand....”

“There is a lot you do not yet understand!” yelled Dumbledore, aiming his wand right at Harry. “Inconscientus!”

Harry quickly rolled out of the way to avoid the yellow beam, immediately turning his mind from why his shield wasn’t working properly to fighting Dumbledore. He quickly transformed his shoulders into his gryffin wings and took to the air, knowing he stood a better chance if he had more room to avoid the spells.

“Avada Kedavra!” yelled Harry, desperate to exterminate Dumbledore as quickly and efficiently as possible before the battle turned more into his favor.

There was a green flash that filled the room and Harry was amazed that his spell had hit its target. Harry looked at Dumbledore, waiting for him to fall to the ground, the battle to be over. But, Dumbledore showed no such sign. He merely wiped his nose and Harry saw some blood on the hand he used to wipe it with.

“Well, I must congratulate you, Harry,” said Dumbledore, wiping his hand on his robe. “You gave me a nosebleed... well done.”

Harry was shocked. The most powerful spell he knew, the one that killed instantly only gave Dumbledore a nosebleed.... He didn’t stand a chance. How could he possibly stand against someone that strong. Knowing that he couldn’t possibly be victorious in his human form, Harry

transformed into the full gryffin and gave a roar, hoping to maybe scare Dumbledore a bit, though it looked like it didn't work.

"So... you want to turn this from a duel into a monster fight do you?" asked Dumbledore, licking his lips. "Well then, Harry Potter, prepare to be defeated even worse than you would have been!"

With that, Dumbledore closed his eyes, threw out his arms, and let the animal form consume him, take him over. Instantly, the new Dumbledore appeared in animal form, and it was the most terrifying animal Harry had ever seen.

At first, Harry just thought it was a giant Black Phoenix, which was essentially what it was. But, then he noticed the razor-sharp teeth, the snakes coming out of the head, and the scorpion tail and claws that it had as well. All of that mixed in with a one hundred foot long and fifty foot wide black skeleton of a phoenix made for one horrifying monster. Harry realized that Dumbledore wasn't just a normal Animagus... he was like Malfoy, a Polymagus, and he had created the perfect, most terrible monster the world had ever seen.

"Do you like it?" asked Dumbledore in Harry's mind. He was snapping his teeth, claws, snake mouths and poison-filled needle tail all over the place as he spoke. "I'm not exactly sure what to call it, but it is powerful, that's for sure!"

Knowing that he didn't stand a chance, and knowing that he was going to be killed instantly, and knowing that Dumbledore would wipe the floor with him, Harry summoned up all the courage that he possessed and flew straight at Dumbledore, bearing all of his teeth, ready to tear into the bony and gassy flesh.

But, just as he was about to bite down on whatever it was the Black Phoenix skin was made out of, one of Dumbledore's claws whacked Harry straight across the body, sending him flying through the air and straight into the wall. From his position, Harry slid down the surface of the wall, making a single, long crack in it as he went. When he finally collapsed on the floor, Harry felt as though every bone in his body was broken.

"Give up?" laughed Dumbledore, bending down and looking right at Harry in the face with his phoenix eyes.

"You... wish..." gasped Harry, trying to bear the pain, though it was far easier said than done. Knowing that if he transformed back into his human form most of the damage would be repaired, Harry called upon every ounce of energy that he had, and morphed back into his even weaker, but healthy, human body.

"Have you had enough of fighting in animal forms?"

"I... don't know... have you?"

"Oh Harry, you make it seem as though I enjoy this," sighed Dumbledore. "But, truth be told, I don't. I would love it so much if people would just believe what I told them long ago, and I wouldn't have to do it this way. But, like I said before, humans are stupid like that."

"Yeah, I'm surprised no one would embrace you as the universal dictator... especially if they saw you like this."

"Come now, Harry," said Dumbledore in a fairly cheery voice, considering the circumstances. He quickly turned back into his human form, shrinking over forty feet in less than a second. It was quite a spectacular sight. "You are weak, practically dead, you cannot possibly fight anymore. Please, just give me the Ring and it will all be over."

"I'll never give it to you... you traitor."

"You do realize, then, that I will have to cut off your hand."

"Go ahead," seethed Harry. "Make my day."

“So be it...” sighed Dumbledore, making the same sword Voldemort had called upon pop out of the tip of his wand. He started walking up to Harry, holding it as if he were ready to slice up a piece of meat.

Harry closed his eyes and banged his head against the wall. It was over... it was all over. No one was going to come and save him this time. Dumbledore was going to take the Ring, absorb him and Voldemort’s souls, and then become a universal dictator... and who knows what he could do with those powers? But, no one could stop him. Not Harry, not even Voldemort. The only thing that could stop him was if Dumbledore decided to change his mind, and there was no chance of that happening.... Unless... unless someone else changed his mind for him! That was it!

“ANATA NARU!” screamed Harry, ripping his wand out of his pocket, and taking Dumbledore completely by surprise. If he wasn’t going to change his mind by himself, Harry was going to do it for him! He was going to use Dumbledore’s incredible power to destroy the Items and put a stop to this once and for all!

Just like in his duel with Malfoy, it looked as though time around them had frozen, and a black, gassy cloud began coming out of each of them. The clouds materialized above their heads and then switched places, flowing back into the other person’s body. The next thing Harry knew, he was staring at himself... through Dumbledore’s eyes! The spell had worked! He had become Dumbledore!

“No!” exclaimed Dumbledore in Harry’s body. “Look what you have done!”

“And look at what I’m going to do to your Items!” yelled Harry, feeling more powerful in Dumbledore’s body than he ever had in his own. He ripped the Sorcerer’s Stone necklace off of his neck and held it in front of him with one arm, pointing his wand at it with the other. Harry finally decided on a spell to use to destroy it, got ready to say it... but then couldn’t.

Harry tried again. He thought of the Explosion Spell in his mind, got ready to use it... but then, no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t say the words to summon the spell! It was as if his lips had been sewn together! He couldn’t speak the words!

“What’s going on!?” Harry demanded to Dumbledore. “Why can’t I destroy it!?”

“You fool,” he hissed, standing up and holding his side. “Don’t you know that the Anata Naru Spell only lets you switch bodies with someone... not minds? You aren’t going to be able to do anything in my body that I wouldn’t have wanted to do.”

“But,” stuttered Harry, in shock that his plan was not going to work, “how come I was able to do whatever I wanted in Malfoy’s body?”

“You weren’t,” said Dumbledore, not used to the youthful voice and body yet. “It just so happened that you were able to turn Draco back into his human form because deep down, in an almost invisible amount, he wanted you to win. Despite how much he denied it, the two of you still were, and probably will always be, friends... deep down of course... very deep down. But, with me, no matter how deep down you check, you will find absolutely no desire to destroy the Items.”

Now Harry was stuck. He couldn’t stay in Dumbledore’s body because he wouldn’t be able to do anything that Dumbledore wouldn’t want to do... which is basically everything that he did want to do! But, he couldn’t trade bodies back. The instant he did, Dumbledore would cast another spell on him and he would win. Harry had to think of an alternative method... but what? What could he possibly do? He was stuck between a rock and a hard place, and there was a man-eating bush in the middle. Harry went over in his mind every single spell, charm, hex and curse that he knew... but to no avail.

Harry stood there, looking at everything in the room, hoping to find the answer when suddenly his eyes grew wide. He could feel his heart beating in his chest... and a light bulb went off in his head! He knew what to do!

He knew how he could win!

“I think I’ll be taking that Ring now!” Harry yelled, grabbing onto Dumbledore with one arm, and then bringing the hand with the sword still in it up in the air, ready to slice down.

“No! You wouldn’t!” exclaimed Dumbledore. “Not to your own body!”

Not listening to him, Harry brought the sword down on Dumbledore’s arm, cutting the hand with the Ring on it off. The dead hand fell to the ground, made a soft and squishy sound, and then began letting out a pool of blood all around it.

“AARRGG!” yelled Dumbledore in Harry’s body, gripping onto his stub and falling to his knees from the pain. Still trying to ignore him for now, Harry picked up the hand, and pulled the Skull Ring off. After giving it a quick kiss, he slipped it on his finger, instantly feeling reborn. If Harry had thought he felt more powerful than he used to before, it was nothing compared to how he felt now! Harry felt as though he had already made and drank one hundred Immortality Potions! He was on top of the world, and no one could beat him!

But no! Harry had to remind himself that that was not part of the plan! The Ring could not stay on his hand... he had to put it back now, give it back to his old self. But he couldn’t... the feeling that the Ring gave him; it was... incredible! But Harry had to remind himself, this wasn’t his body... this wasn’t his body!

Using every bit of willpower that he possessed, Harry quickly tore the Ring off of his finger and threw it back onto Dumbledore’s other hand. Though, he didn’t realize that he got it back; he was still busy crying and gripping onto his bleeding stub.

“ANA... TA.... NA... RU,” gasped Harry, feeling incredibly worn out from giving up the Ring. But, the knowledge that it would all soon be over got him through it. Once again, time appeared to freeze, and the same black clouds popped out of Harry and Dumbledore, floating back to their original bodies just as quickly as they had switched in the first place.

Almost instantly, Harry was back in his old body... and in immense pain! It was only matched by last year, when he had caught the Snitch then hidden spikes had popped out of it, impaling themselves through his hand. But, Harry knew that the hard part was over, it was all the home stretch now... the final sprint! Knowing that, he pushed the pain aside, and glared at Dumbledore.

“Now what purpose did that just serve?” he demanded, looking a bit woozy from changing bodies.

“Don’t you know?” asked Harry, standing up and tasting victory. “Whoever is currently wearing the Ring has the ability to control the bodies and minds of everyone else that has ever worn it. And, approximately fifteen seconds ago I believe, you wore the Ring, meaning I control you now.”

“What...?” gasped Dumbledore, looking in shock. “No! That’s impossible!”

“I’m afraid it isn’t!” grinned Harry, feeling more powerful now than he ever did, even in Dumbledore’s body. “Now! Destroy the Stone!”

“NOO!” screamed Dumbledore, his body and mouth operating independently of each other. While his mouth was screaming no and begging Harry to stop, his arms were doing something completely different. His left arm picked up the Sorcerer’s Stone necklace, held it in front of himself, and his right arm held the wand aimed right at it, ready to blow it to pieces... which is exactly what it did less than a second later.

“NO!” yelled Dumbledore again, seeing the precious Stone explode into millions of tiny specs that slowly fell to the floor, forming a tiny pile. “Please, Harry, stop! Stop while there’s still hope! The Sorcerer’s Stone can be replaced but the other Items... they cannot!”

“Silence!” yelled Harry, never feeling more sure of anything else in his life. “Now! Destroy the Bracelet!”

“No! Harry! Stop! NO!”

But, despite all of Dumbledore’s protest, he ripped the Bracelet off of his arm, held it in front of himself in the same way that he did with the Stone and then blew it to smithereens with his wand, destroying with it any hope Dumbledore now had of becoming an all-powerful being.

“Now, destroy the Watch,” said Harry, wanting to be rid of everything, just to be perfectly safe.

“Harry... stop...” said Dumbledore, sounding much less demanding and assertive now. He took the Watch off of his arm, held it in front of himself and then made it explode into a shower of blue specs that landed on top of some of the other tiny remains of the others on the floor.

“Now...” said Harry, taking a deep breath. “The Glove.”

“Harry... please,” said Dumbledore, now crying as he peeled off the final Item from his arm. Bursting into tears, he held the Glove in front of him and blew it away, finally, and once and for all, stopping any chance he would ever have.

“I hope you’re happy now,” said Dumbledore, looking at Harry as someone would look at a man who just stole every possession he ever owned, killed his wife and kids, and then ripped his leg off. “You just destroyed any hope humanity ever had at a perfect utopia, where everyone lives in peace with each other! I hope you’re happy, Harry! I really do!”

“Peace cannot be achieved through war,” said Harry, trying to make one, final point. “Now, Dumbledore, one last command... BE GONE!”

“I’ll get you Harry!” he screamed, pointing his wand at himself. “You just wait! No matter where you are, or where you will be, you’ll never be safe because I-”

But, Harry didn’t hear anymore than that. At that instant, Dumbledore burst into flames and turned into a small pile of ash on the floor, disappearing in the same way as all of his minions did, leaving the room, and the side of good forever.

“Well...” said Harry to himself, looking around and realizing he was still the only conscious person in the room. “We won...”

And, after smiling just one more time, Harry closed his eyes and fainted.

Chapter 32- Harry’s Final Trial

Harry had no idea how long it was from when he collapsed on the floor in the Great Hall to when he woke up on a cot, half naked in the same exact spot. It was impossible to see the floor in the massive room since it was covered with small beds everywhere, each with its own student laying on top of it, in varying states of health. Some were all bandaged up like mummies, others only had a few scratches. Harry looked and saw that his arm had been reattached. He flexed the fingers a few times, just to be sure, and it worked perfectly. Laying back down on the cot, Harry’s last thought before he fell asleep again was if now, with Dumbledore having showed whom he was truly allied with, if good still had a chance over evil.

“Harry!” came a soft voice what felt like not too much later. “Harry... get up!”

After mumbling a few incoherent words, Harry sat up in his bed, rubbed his eyes, put on his glasses, and saw Professor McGonagall sitting down on his bed, with Ron on one side of her and Hermione and Cho on the other. All of them still had bandages on in random spots and Harry saw that most of the room had been cleared out. None of them were smiling, though, and Harry didn't blame them. What was there to smile about when the one person you always thought would be your leader, ally, and most importantly friend turned his back and you, and then punched you when you weren't looking?

"Well, it seems as though big heroes need big amounts of sleep," sighed Professor McGonagall, smiling for only the briefest of moments, then returning to her solemn face. "You were the last to fall in that battle and the last to wake up."

"At first, we weren't sure if you were going to," choked Cho.

"You gave us quite a scare," added Hermione.

"Yes, well... at least everything is okay now," said Ron, looking down.

"No, Ron," said Harry, standing up despite the pain in every bone and muscle in his body. "No... everything is not okay and it will never be okay ever again."

"You're right," sighed Professor McGonagall, not moving her face slightly away from Harry. "Nothing will ever be okay again, Harry. Now that Dumbledore is... gone shall I say? Well, now I'm not sure what is going to happen."

"I just don't get it," heaved Harry, wanting to tear all of his hair off of his head. "I just don't get it! How could he... all this time? Every time he smiled at me, every time he even looked at me... how could I have known that behind that mask he was wearing there was another, totally different person?"

"You couldn't have," groaned the professor again, rubbing her legs and standing up. "No one ever expected anything like this. No one...."

"But I should have!" exclaimed Harry, getting pangs of guilt. "Last year, at the Charms O.W.L. exam, I should have known something was up when we were allowed to use killing curses! I should have known something wasn't quite right when I heard he was the one that instituted Extreme Quidditch! It's all my fault!"

"It's not your fault," said Cho, walking over to Harry and putting her arm around him. "It's not yours, mine, Ron, Hermione's, it's nobody's fault! The only person that is responsible for what happened is Dumbledore himself."

"Well, him, You-Know-Who, and Quirrell," added Professor McGonagall. "At least one of those three is gone. Quirrell fled last night, never to come back."

"Those three aside," continued Cho. "Who was the one who made them come over to his side in the first place? Dumbledore. He is the source of everything that has happened ever since You-Know-Who's rise to power, and he will continue to be the source. The only way to stop evil once and for all is to beat him."

"And just how are we going to do that, Miss. Chang?" asked Professor McGonagall. "Dumbledore is the most powerful wizard in the world. Even if every person in this school teamed up against him, I still don't think we'd win. Plus, he's still got all of his followers to deal with."

"Don't worry," said Harry. "As long as I have my Ring, Dumbledore is under my power."

"If only that were true, Harry," moaned McGonagall.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "That's how I beat him this time and it's how I'm going to beat him again!"

“Harry... don’t you know that there is a cure for the spell that the Ring puts on you?” she asked in an obvious tone of voice. “How do you think we cured Miss. Granger here? I’m sure that by now, Dumbledore has already healed himself of the curse.”

“How do you know about that incident with Hermione?” asked Harry.

“Pomfrey always informs the professors of unusual conditions,” she explained. “At first, she didn’t even know what it was that was wrong with her. She asked me, and I knew what must have happened. So, you see, if even I know of the cure, I am positive Dumbledore does as well.”

“So then... have we lost already?” asked Harry. “Before the battle has even begun?”

“I don’t know...” she sighed, checking her watch “I don’t know. But, I do know that I still have much work to do, this school is in desperate need of repair after what happened. I hope you will excuse me and that I will see you all tomorrow at breakfast... the last one you will have this year?”

“Of course, professor,” said the four of them together. Not even smiling, Professor McGonagall made her away across the dilapidated Great Hall and through the door, each step echoing throughout the hall. As soon as she walked through it, another rather large chunk of the top of the archway fell to the floor. She cursed loudly and then stomped off back to wherever she was going.

“Wow Harry,” said Ron after a long silence. “I can’t believe you actually beat Dumbledore.”

“I’m not sure if that’s the best thing to brag about,” said Harry, glaring at his friend. “It’s kind of along the same line as you practically killing the entire school... only worse.”

“Yeah, I was a machine, wasn’t I?” said Ron, looking a little proud of himself. “But, I didn’t kill anyone, only hurt them all. Voldemort was the one that did the murdering. Though, I’ve decided to not stay a werewolf anymore. Madam Pomfrey performed the Homorphus Spell on me earlier today.”

“Why not?” asked Harry. “Being able to turn into that monster could come in handy. After all, if you hadn’t transformed during the dance, I would have lost at the very beginning. There was no way I could have stood up against all of those kids at once like you did.”

“Oh don’t get me wrong,” added Ron. “I loved the surge of power I got when I turned into the beast, being able to destroy wave after wave of students as if it was nothing, but that’s part of the reason why I decided against it. I don’t really want to go around killing people. Also, I’ve already got a chameleon in me, and I don’t know if there would have been enough room for the wolf after all.”

The four of them had a good laugh, for the first time in what seemed like forever.

“We’ll I’ve got to go take some follow-up medicine,” said Ron. “I guess I’ll see you tomorrow guys.”

“And I have to go quickly write a letter to my parents, telling them that they don’t have to pick me up tomorrow, since I’ll be spending the summer at Ron’s house.”

“Ohh...” said Harry, battering his eyelashes. “How romantic!”

“Shut up!” grinned Hermione, punching Harry in the shoulder and leaving the room. Harry and Cho were now the only ones left in it... they were all alone.

“Well, Cho,” said Harry, looking outside the window and seeing that the sun was beginning to set. “It’s getting late. I guess it’s time to go to bed.”

“Actually... Harry,” said Cho in a slightly timid voice.

“Yeah?”

“I was wondering...” she smiled, curling her hair with a finger. “After all, this is our last night together. I’ve graduated already, and you’ll still be a student next year. So, since this is the

final time we'll be with each other, for a while... and I have my dorm room all to myself tonight.... Why don't we do something... special?"

Harry swallowed hard, knowing exactly what she was talking about. His first instinct was to jump at the opportunity, agree, and then go with her. But, then he thought.... After all that happened, how could he even think about it? How could he celebrate what happened? It would be as if he was going to throw a birthday party the day after his best friend died. After just wading in those thoughts, Harry knew he couldn't. He so wanted to... but he just... couldn't. It would just be wrong.

"Oh, Cho..." sighed Harry, feeling all torn up inside. "Believe me when I say this. I would give anything to, but considering all that has happened.... I just... can't. I'm sorry, Cho. I really am."

"Oh... well, that's okay Harry," she said, looking a little surprised and even a little hurt. "I guess... I'll see you later then."

"Yeah, I guess so," sighed Harry, staring down at the floor, and listening to the sound of her footsteps as they got softer and softer as she walked away from him, out the door, and then down the hall, probably out of his life forever.

Just then, a new emotion began to boil up inside of Harry. It wasn't anger, it wasn't sadness, it wasn't like anything he had ever experienced before. It was extreme hate. Hate beyond anything Harry could have ever possibly imagined. Just from the unimaginable amounts of hate flowing through Harry, he could feel his heart beating faster, his teeth salivating, his body shaking, and his eyes glowing. Dumbledore had cost him everything... everything. He had taken away everyone he had ever loved in his life, his dad, his mom, and now Cho.

"DUMBLEDORE!" screamed Harry at the top of his lungs, so loud that more chunks fell from the ceiling. "Mark my words! You are going to pay! Do you hear me!? YOU ARE GOING TO PAY!"

Harry wasn't exactly sure how he fell asleep that night. All he remembered doing was walking into his dorm, seeing three of the six beds occupied, and then two that were never to be filled again. He sighed to himself and fell into his pillow, letting sleep overtake him, overtake him as swiftly and powerfully as he hoped to overtake Dumbledore someday... someday soon.

But, no matter how he did it, Harry did fall asleep, and woke up bright and early the next morning, feeling infinitely refreshed. With Ron and Hermione by his side, Harry walked down to the Great Hall that looked in much better condition than it did the previous night. Almost everything was back in working order, looking clean, and some house elves were even working on it right now, polishing walls and wearing massive smiles. What happened last night didn't affect them... outside of giving them more work to do. Harry envied their naiveness, how he wished he could just forget what happened, or even better, have it so that it never happened at all.

"Welcome students," announced Professor McGonagall, now the new Headmaster, a few minutes into the meal once everyone was down there. Harry noticed that there were considerably fewer students there than usual. Harry hoped that they were still in the Hospital Wing and not in a coffin. "While I am not exactly sure how to explain to you what happened last night," she stopped as there was a sudden crack of thunder outside and a lightning flash filled the sky. Rain began pouring down on the school in buckets. Evidently, even the weather was angry and sad about what had happened, and Harry didn't blame it in the least, "since most of you were under a powerful controlling spell, but I will say this, even though you all probably know it by now. Your previous Headmaster, Professor Albus Dumbledore, is no longer with us."

“That’s because he’s a dirty traitor!” yelled one of the students, standing up and showing that he had his arm in a sling. “He’s been You-Know-Who’s master all of this time!” Suddenly, most of the people in the Hall began joining in with the student, yelling random, horrible phrases.

“Yeah!”

“Dumbledore stinks!”

“Down with Dumbledore!”

“He’s even slimier than You-Know-Who!”

“Now now!” announced McGonagall, trying to calm down the crowd a little. “I see that you all do know what really happened. I guess news really does travel fast in this school. Seeing as you all already understand the situation, I will not go into any more detail about it. I do not want to take the risk of offending anyone’s beliefs, and will play it safe by letting you talk about it amongst yourselves, and having us professors deal with it.

“Now, I have two more announcements,” she continued, another flash of lightning and crack of thunder exploding outside. “First, I regret to inform the Slytherin House that you are no longer the House Cup winners. After removing the points that the illegal students gave your house, and adding many points to certain people that deserve it beyond what points can be give,” she looked at Harry, and applauded him with her eyes. He just kept staring at the floor, “Gryffindor is the new House Cup winner!”

There was some scattered applause and cheering from the members of the house, but nothing nearly as enthusiastic as it usually was. Harry didn’t even open his mouth. There was no reason to celebrate, and there would be none until Dumbledore was defeated. Now Harry could truly understand why there was such a massive celebration the day that Voldemort was finally vanquished.

“I am afraid that my next announcement is not nearly as cheerful as my previous one,” she announced, sounding quite grim, and Harry had a feeling he knew what was coming. “As in Hogwart’s tradition, it is now my sorrowful duty to announce all those who are unfortunate enough not to be with us right now. I must now announce to you all everybody who died last night in the horrible attack on our school.”

The entire Hall was quieter than Harry had ever thought it could possibly be. Even the house elves stopped working for a moment, and a single mouse that was scurrying across the floor froze, as if not wanting to spoil the sacred moment.

“Prancy Patil, Stewart Ackerly, Joe Coppelotti, Paulo Calvacanti, Mandy Brocklehurst, Neville Longbottom, Ernie Macmillan, Aylar Dumbledore, Trenholm Archibald, Rusty Johnson, Eleanor Branstone, Akshay Dayal, Susan Bones, Morag MacDougal, Chris Zimmermann, Mike Baronowski, Vikram Kumar, Malcolm Baddock, Justin Finch-Fletchley, Blaise Zabini, Terry Boot, Owen Cauldwell, Hannah Abbott, and Pawan Kodandopani are all dead. This is by far the most casualties Hogwarts has ever had in all of its years, and I ask you all to raise your glasses to all of them at once, honoring them all in the same spirit....To everyone!”

“To everyone!” repeated everybody in the Hall, raising their glasses and then taking the finals sips, finishing the last of their drinks, ending the year.

The rest of breakfast was quite uneventful, considering everything that had happened. The entire school finished packing up their things and then made their way outside, which had cleared up considerably. As Harry walked out of the school with Ron and Hermione, each of them carrying several cases of stuff, the sun shone brightly and the birds were singing. It was very serene and beautiful, and Harry tried to take it all in as he walked down with his friends to the Hogwarts Express and sat down in their usual seats, ready to go. It wasn’t too much longer before

the train got on its way; the inside of the school was not a very happy place, and everyone for once, was eager to leave it for a little while.

“So,” said Ron a ways into the trip, breaking the silence that had overtaken the three of them for the past hour or so, “what do you think the next year’s going to be like, Harry?”

Harry’s first reaction was to say that they were all doomed, that it was going to be their worst year ever, and they’d be incredibly lucky if they all even lived through it. But, then he looked outside the window on the train, and saw how wonderful everything looked now that the sun had come out. Less than a few hours ago, it had been pouring rain, with no sign of stopping. But now... now it was one of the most beautiful days Harry had seen.

“Well, nobody knows for sure,” said Harry.

“Except Professor Trelawney,” interjected Ron, smiling.

“Oh yes, except for her,” continued Harry, grinning. “But, I can say this: every cloud has a silver lining... if you know where to look.”

Both Ron and Hermione nodded their heads and beamed at Harry’s response. It was one of the most positive things they had heard all day and it cheered all of them up. Maybe Dumbledore had a silver lining... maybe. Harry just first had to find out where to look for it.

Just then, the train gave off a long hiss, pulled to a stop, and Harry realized that they had arrived at the station. Wondering how the trip could have ended that fast, Harry, Ron and Hermione, along with the rest of the students stepped off of the train, and walked up to their families.

“Hey Ron!” exclaimed Fred upon seeing his little brother step off of the train. “What gives? I thought you said only me and George had to come!”

“Yeah!” said Percy, looking quite furious. “I thought it was very important! I am missing extremely valuable work time!”

“And I had to Apparate in from Romania!” announced Charlie.

“And I had to come in from Egypt!” said an angry-looking Bill.

“Ron?” asked Mr. Weasley, stepping forward and looking very confused. “What’s going on here?”

“And you’d better have a good explanation!” fumed Mrs. Weasley, waving a finger at her son. Ron just grinned to them all, and Harry and Hermione stepped aside, to let this be more of a Weasley-only affair.

“Mom... dad... Percy, Fred, George, Charlie, Bill, Ginny, and anyone else I may have forgotten,” said Ron, smiling from ear to ear. “I am very pleased to announced the arrival of... Jamie Weasley.”

At that moment, Ron bowed, and Jamie, extremely timidly, walked down the steps of the train, and in front of her entire family. She was cleaned up very nicely: her skin was no longer brown and muddy, but a very nice peach. Her clothes were just like everyone else’s, and her hair was no longer the size of an ape. It was straight and beautiful and only came down to right below her neck. Her face was as red as her hair, and everyone was staring at her, wide-eyed and mouths gaping open.

“Hello everybody,” she said so quietly it was barely audible.

“Jamie...?” said Mr. Weasley in about the same tone of voice. “Is it... really you?”

“Yes daddy,” said giggled.

“Jamie!” exclaimed Mrs. Weasley, now in tears and running up to her full-grown daughter. She embraced her like Harry had never seen anyone else do before. She cried deeply into her shoulder and everyone else in the family joined in, being too overcome with happiness to say anything.”

“Hey Harry!” came Dudley’s voice from behind. Harry turned around and saw his cousin, much taller now than he was at the end of Summer. Behind him stood his parents, Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia, looking no different, especially in their expressions of being annoyed, angry, and bored all at the same time. “Sorry to intrude on your little love-in there, but are you ready to go?”

“Yeah,” said Harry, feeling more cheerful now than he ever remembered feeling. He picked up his bags and began walking over towards his family... when suddenly, he thought of something.

“Wait a minute!” said Harry quickly, dropping his bags. “I’ve got one last thing to do!” Hearing sighs from his Uncle and Aunt, Harry sprinted as fast as he could to the other end of the train station that led out into a giant meadow surrounded by a massive lake. Harry ran up to the lake, and using every ounce of willpower and determination in his body, he ripped the Ring off of his finger, looked at it one last time, and then threw it as far as he could into the body of water, hearing it’s incredibly faint plop as it hit the water far away.

That being done, Harry walked back to his bags, picked them up, and smiled.

“Yes Dudley,” said Harry, taking a deep breath. “Now... now I am ready to go.”

Epilogue

Wow, two books down! One more to go! I can’t believe I actually did it... wow. This Book Six is just ONE page shorter than Book Five was... ARG! Maybe I’ll fix that someday when I’m not swamped with other work, which will probably be... someday.... But, first, I must say that this book would not have been possible if I had not had the support from all of you fans out there, you know who you are. You kept me going. and finally made me produce this story. Thanks guys, thanks for your ideas, suggestions, everything. Thanks.

Now... please don’t hate me! I know I made Dumbledore the bad guy now, but please don’t hate me for it! Many fans were asking me if I would have an explanation for the “glitter of triumph” in his eye at the end of Book Four, and I didn’t buy any of those other theories that because Voldemort used certain blood in the potion, blah blah blah now he’s human, blah blah blah. Alas! Do not fear! Book Seven shall explain EVERYTHING, and bring all that has happened together. You’ll see what Dumbledore’s real deal is...

Also, I know that an incredible amount of people died in this book, both people that were close to Harry and the plot of the series and others who were always kind of just... there. This book was also (hopefully) a little scarier than the others, with the pyramid and stuff, and trust me, the Seventh One will just be even more terrifying....

Whoops, I'd better stop there before I give anything away! But, like last time, this book has changed an INCREDIBLE amount from start to finish. At the beginning, there was no card game, only one Item (the Ring), no missing Weasley sister, no Disguise Dance, and Dumbledore didn't even turn evil at the end! Yeah... it was pretty bad the first time through. It took me forever to edit all that stuff in and make the story still flow. But, in the end, I think it turned out pretty okay.

Yet again, after reading this Book Six and the Fifth Book, you probably still have some unanswered questions. Why couldn't they kill Harry? Why did Dumbledore want Harry's parents dead? What IS Voldemort's final backup plan? Fear not! All these and much... MUCH more shall be revealed in the Seventh and Final Book. But please, don't forget, I am still in the planning phase for Book Seven, and I only have a basic plot and good ending written up for it that I think shall be almost exactly what J.K. Rowling is planning to have. Any extra things that you guys would like to see in it, or ideas you have that could make it better are very welcome. You can either e-mail me them, tell me in the forum, or tell me on AIM. See you online!

-HarryWriter